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The GEM 2^D



REDSKINS of ST. JIM'S!

HERE'S A REAL RIP-SNORTING YARN OF ST. JIM'S, TELLING HOW—

REDSKINS



Tom Merry & Co. got the "wind up" when they were attacked by four "Redskins" in Rylcombe Woods, but they failed to notice that one of the Indians was wearing an eyeglass!

CHAPTER 1. The Mystery!

TOM MERRY stood at the window of his study in the School House at St. Jim's, looking out into the quadrangle, with a half-puzzled, half-wrathful expression upon his usually sunny face.

He was looking at four juniors who were standing in a group under the elm-trees, chatting and laughing together as if over some great joke among themselves.

The four were Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, the chums of Study No. 6 in the School House. Tom Merry had been watching them for some minutes as they stood chatting under the elms, the puzzled expression growing upon his face.

"The bounders!" he muttered. "What is it? What can it be? What is the giddy mystery, anyway?"

"Hallo! What are you muttering about?" asked Manners, looking up from some photographic prints he was finishing. "Anything wrong?"

"Yes."

"What is it?" asked Manners carelessly.

"It's those rotters in Study No. 6 again!"

"What about them?" asked Manners, devoting himself to his work. "Anything wrong in Study No. 6?"

Tom Merry gave him a withering look.

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"I wish you'd put those rotten prints away and talk sense for a little while—I do, really, Manners!" he said, somewhat tartly.

"But I want to get them done—"

"I expect we shall be done ourselves if we don't look out!"

"Hallo! What's on?" said Manners, showing some interest at last. "Have those kids in Study No. 6 got anything up against us?"

"I'm pretty certain they have."

"Then we shall have to look out."

"Come and look at them now."

Manners reluctantly left his prints and stepped to the window. Blake and his chums were still chatting under the elms and laughing merrily. They did not see the chums of the Shell at the study window.

"What do you think of that?" demanded Tom Merry. "For the last two or three days they've been chuckling over some wheeze they've got up their sleeves, and not letting on a word about it."

"Yes; I've noticed something of the sort."

"What can it be?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Manners, going back to the table. "I can work out a chess problem for you, if you like, but I can't guess conundrums like that."

"It's been the same ever since that hamper came for Blake from his uncle in America," said Tom Merry. "There

of ST. JIM'S!



By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

was a lot of mystery about that hamper. When Blake opened it he had his study door locked."

"Yes; I know he did. I expect he was afraid there would be a rush for the grub."

"There wasn't grub in a hamper from a ranch in Wyoming, ass! I suppose Blake's uncle wouldn't send him a lot of canned beef or tinned things, would he? And anything else wouldn't keep. Blake doesn't like tinned meat."

"I don't know. I had an uncle once—I've got him still, for that matter—who sent me a box full of fossils for a birthday present," said Manners. "If an uncle would do that, he would do anything."

"I tell you there wasn't grub in the hamper. There hasn't been any sign of unusual feasting in Study No. 6 lately. Besides, Blake's not mean. He'd have asked a good many fellows in if there had been a feed going."

"Well, yes; there's something in that," assented Manners. "What do you think of this one, Tom?"

Tom Merry glanced at the photograph.

"H'm! I don't think the cow has come out very well, Manners."

The amateur photographer of the Merry Hobby Club looked at Tom Merry as if he would eat him.

"You don't think that what has come out very well?" he asked.

"The cow," said Tom Merry innocently.

"That's an interior!" said Manners witheringly. "That's the chapel of St. Jim's on a Sunday afternoon."

"Well, I'm not a photographer, and I suppose you know best," said Tom Merry. "But I don't see how you can get a cow into a photograph of the inside of the chapel on a Sunday afternoon."

"You—your unspeakable ass! There's no cow!"

"Yes; that cow—the grey cow—"

"That's the Head in his gown!"

"Oh, is it? I thought it was a cow. Now, don't be ratty, Manners, old chap. I really thought it was a cow; but it's just as much like the Head—"

"You ass!"

"It's a jolly good photograph!" said Tom Merry, looking at it again. "Now I examine it more closely, I can see that it is the Head. And this figure in white is—"

"That's not a figure in white! That's the light on the stained-glass window—"

"Yes; of course it is! And this black dog here—"

Manners snatched the photograph away.

"A lot of good it is showing things to a Philistine like

you!" he exclaimed. "Of course, I couldn't expect you to understand!"

"Well, I can't help it if you take a photograph of the Head that looks like a grey cow, can I? Don't be unreasonable, Manners! You took the photograph!"

Manners only grunted.

"But to come back to business," went on Tom Merry soothingly. "It wasn't grub in the hamper Blake had from his uncle in America. It was something they have been keeping awfully dark, and that, I believe, is what they are jawing over now."

"Let 'em jaw!" growled the ruffled Manners.

"Well, if you want Study No. 6 to become top study in the School House, and Blake to go around crowing that he's cock of the House—"

"Oh, rats! Why don't you find out what was in the hamper, then?"

"That's what I want to do," said Tom Merry. "But I don't get any backing up in this study. With you dabbling over rotten photographic prints all day, and Lowther with his nose prodding into a book all the time—"

Monty Lowther looked up from the latest number of the "Modern Boy," and grinned.

"Hallo! Who's that taking my name in vain?"

"Oh, are you awake?" asked Tom Merry sarcastically. "You'd better keep on reading, and Manners had better keep on hobnobbing, while Blake & Co. knock the study into a cocked hat, and we become a set of guys for the Third Form fags to grin at!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Monty Lowther.

"That's what it will come to. Blake and those other rotters have something up against us, and in the time that's passed since they've received that hamper we haven't found out what it is."

"Well, you're leader of this study," said Manners. "Why the dickens don't you look into the hamper?"

"I have looked into it."

"What!"

"I have looked into it," said Tom Merry calmly. "It has been shoved into the box-room. But it's empty now, so I didn't learn much by looking into it."

"Oh!"

"Whatever was in it has been taken out, of course, and it's been kept awfully dark by those rotters. Now, what is it?"

"Don't ask riddles."

"We've got to find out what's wrong," said Tom Merry. "Manners, put away that bosh at once! Lowther, shove that book out of sight! If I'm leader of this study, I'm going to be followed! If I'm not backed up, to get to the bottom of this, I shall chuck this study and join Blake, or else Figgins & Co.!"

"Well, I'm about finished, and I can't work with you chaps jawing away like a pair of magpies!" said Manners. "I'm done!"

Lowther put his book into his pocket.

"There you are, my son!"

"That's better!" said Tom Merry. "There's a time for work and a time for play, and it's a time for work now—"

"Then not so much gas!" said Manners. "What I say is—"

"If you call my remarks gas, Manners, you're in danger of getting ornamented with a thick ear!"

"Rats!" said Manners cheerfully. "Come to the point! You think Study No. 6 have something up against us, and we're to get on to the little game. How are we going to do it?"

"That's the question."

"What's to be done?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"That will want thinking out," said Merry, running his fingers thoughtfully through his curly hair.

"You might have let me go on with my book while you were thinking it out," grunted Lowther. "I was in an awfully interesting part. It was about a silly ass who would keep on talking—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Manners.

"Oh, don't be funny, Lowther!" said Tom Merry pathetically. "You are all right when you are not funny, but when you are funny, old man, life is not worth living; and, besides, you start Manners going like a German alarm clock—"

"Look here—" began Manners wrathfully.

"Oh, stick to the point! We've got to discover what Blake & Co. have on their little minds. We could lick them and make them own up, but there are difficulties in the way of a plan like that. They are four, and we are three, so—"

"They might lick us instead!" grinned Lowther.

"Besides, if they were licked, they mightn't own up. They can be awfully obstinate beasts when they like."

"True!"

"Suppose we try methods of persuasion? I've read that the most savage animals can be overcome and tamed by persuasive methods—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Then it ought to answer with those Fourth Form kids."

"Well, it might. We ought to take them separately, and treat them with kindness, and worm the secret out of them," said Tom Merry. "That's the only thing I can think of, besides walloping them, which wouldn't be much good."

"Good!" said Lowther. "We'll coo to them as gently as a sucking dove."

"That's the idea."

"Then let's go and start the cooing!" said Lowther, rising and stretching his long limbs. "You won't let me read, so we may as well."

Tom Merry glanced out of the window.

Digby and Herries had gone off towards the cricket field, where many of the juniors of St. Jim's were at practice at the nets, and Blake was walking towards the School House with his hands in his pockets. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was still under the elms, engaged in the important occupation of flicking some specks of dust from his beautifully creased trousers.

Tom Merry turned quickly from the window.

"Now's our chance!" he exclaimed. "D'Arcy's alone, and we've got a chance to tackle him without the others, and he's the biggest ass of the lot! Come on!"

"Right you are!"

And the Terrible Three hastily left the study, and walked out of the School House, and bore down upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 2.

A Hint of the Secret!

"NICE afternoon, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, with his most agreeable smile.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy flicked the last speck off his trousers, and looked up with a bored smile.

"Yaas, wathah!" he said. "It is a nice afternoon in some respects, Tom Mewwy, but, weally, I find this dust vewy twyin'!"

"Oh, it's not so dusty!" said Lowther, who never could be restrained from making puns in and out of season.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

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"But it's a pleasant afternoon," said Tom Merry ingratiatingly. "Just the weather for a nice walk with some nice companions!"

"Yaas, I dare say it is, Tom Mewwy! I weally hope you will enjoy your walk!"

"Won't you come with us, Gussy? We've been looking forward to a little walk with you this afternoon."

"Have you weally? You haven't said anythin' about it before, Tom Mewwy."

"It's such pleasant weather," said Lowther. "And you can tell us all about the latest thing in fancy waistcoats!"

"The brooks are babbling through the singing rushes," said Manners; "the sky is shimmering with the golden glory of summer—"

"Oh, weally, Mannahs—"

"Come on, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, linking arms with the swell of St. Jim's. "We really want you to come for a little stroll, Gussy, old chap."

"Pwasy excuse me, Tom Mewwy! I weally find it most exhaustin' to walk about in this warm summah weathah!"

"But it is ripping in the lanes—"

"It's a gweat deal more wippin' undah the shade of a twee, in my opinion, Tom Mewwy!"

"So it is," said Tom Merry immediately. "Let's take a stroll under the elms!"

"It's jolly nice in the shade there," said Lowther.

"First rate!" said Manners. "Gussy is quite right, as he generally is."

"Yaas, wathah! I think that you fellows will admit upon reflection that I am generally in the wight!" said Arthur Augustus, with a nod. "But I weally don't feel inclined for a stroll at all, deah boys!"

"Let's sit on one of the nobby seats," said Manners. "It's delightfully cool and refreshing here, and we can watch the chaps on the cricket field, too."

"Weally, I find it wathah exhaustin' to watch those chaps wunnin' about in the hot weathah!" said D'Arcy.

"Let's turn the other way, then," said Tom Merry, who was bent upon obliging. "It would be too bad if Gussy were exhausted."

"This is wathah comfy!" said Arthur Augustus, sinking upon a seat under the shadiest of the old elms in the quadrangle. "But don't let me detain you fellows."

"Oh, you're not detaining us!" said Tom Merry. "We want to have a little chat with you. What are you thinking of doing this afternoon?"

"Oh, I am going out with Blake and the othahs! I would weally wathah stay here, as I think goin' out in this weathah is wathah exhaustin', but I suppose I must go and look atfah them!"

"Yes; they might get into mischief if they were deprived of your fatherly care!" Lowther remarked gravely.

"Yaas, wathah! You wemembah the time when we had a twip to London, deah boys, and all you fellows got lost, and made me awfully anxious?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes, I remember, Gussy!"

"Why, you ass," began the incautious Manners wrathfully, "it was you who got lost, and you—"

"I uttably wufese to be alluded to as an ass!"

"Well, then, you—"

"Unless Mannahs withdwaws that extwemely obnoxious expwession, I am afwaid that it will be impos for me to wemain in your company, deah boys!"

"I'm not going to do anything of the sort! I—"

"Then I will wetiah!"

Tom Merry and Lowther glared at the unlucky Manners.

"Sit down, Gussy!"

"Unless Mannahs withdwaws—"

"He withdwaws everything—every word he's uttered!"

"No, I don't!" said Manners.

"Yes, you do, ass! You withdwaw all of it, and you apologise to Gussy!"

"No, I don't!"

"Well, I do for you, then!" said Tom Merry. "As chief of the study, and leader of this party, I have the right to apologise for the misdeeds of any of my followers, and I hereby apologise for Manners!"

D'Arcy beamed.

"That is all wight, Tom Mewwy! Your apology is accepted, and mattahs are on their pwecious footin'!"

"My only hat!" grunted Manners. "I—"

"Shut up, Manners! What the dickens do you mean by interrupting D'Arcy, when we're listening with rapt attention to his remarks?"

"Yaas, wathah! Mannahs is wathah wude, but it is extwemely pwob that he was not bwought up to be anythin' else!" said D'Arcy.

Manners nearly exploded, but Tom Merry squeezed his arm in time.

He rose from the seat.

"I think I'll go and have a look at the cricket," he said. "I'll wait for you fellows." And he strode away. D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass, and glanced languidly after him.

"Mannahs is wathah an outsiders!" he remarked. "He has nevah weally tweated me with pwopah wespect! You two fellahs are not much 'bettah, weally! As a mattah of fact, you are a set of wotten outsiders!"

Tom Merry breathed hard through his nose.

"Gussy, old man——"

"Oh, pway don't take any exception to that remark!" said D'Arcy. "As a wule, I twy to keep the circle of my acquaintances wathah select, not to say swaggah! But I am always willin' to twy to impwove you youngstahs!"

"Now, that's rather unfriendly or you, Gussy—it is, really!"

"Is it, weally, Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes, I think you ought to let us know what's on, and perhaps we can help you in some way to carry out the idea."

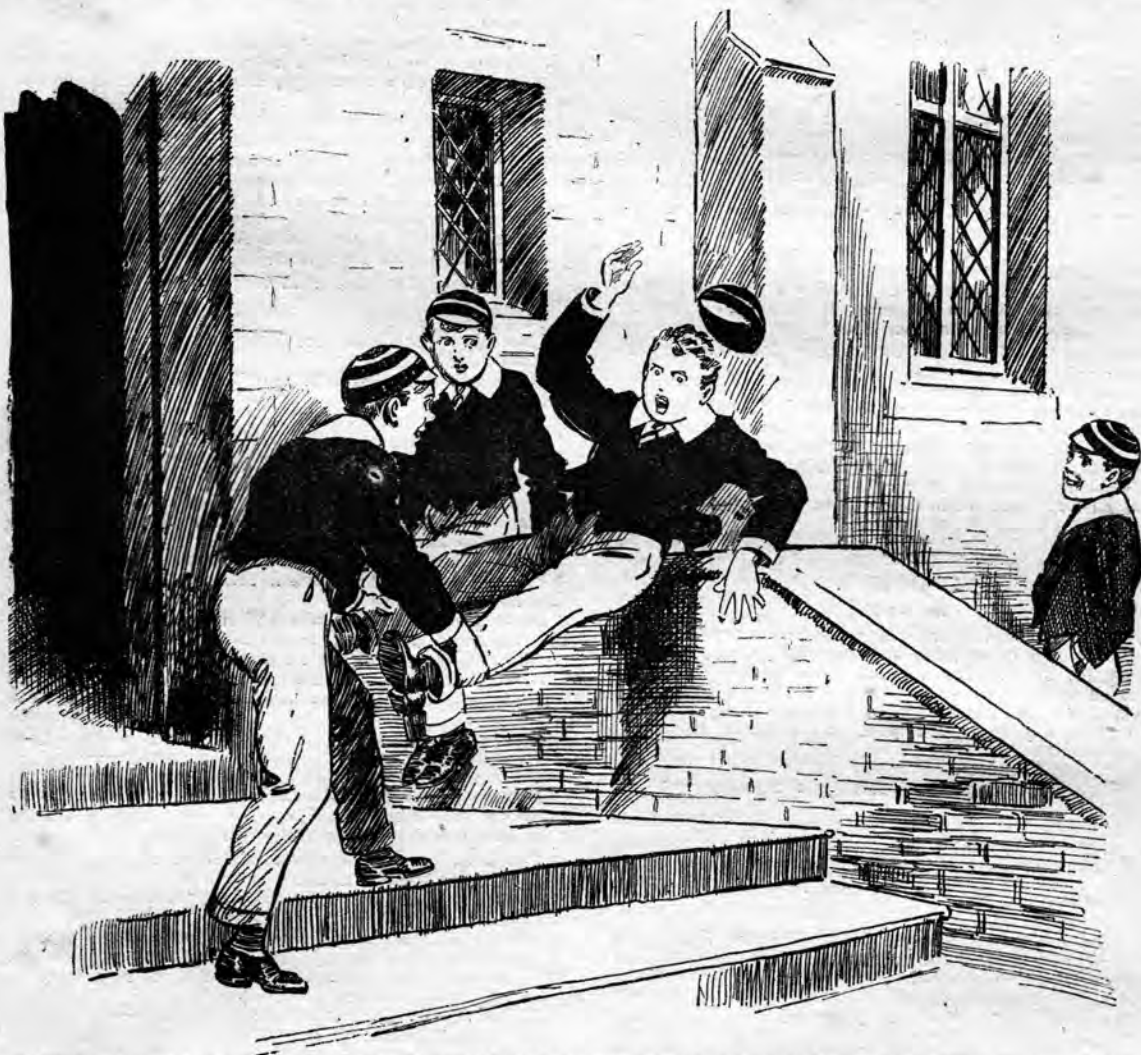
D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye and looked thoughtful.

"Blake told me I was not to say a word," he remarked.

"Pewwaps upon the whole I had bettah keep it dark, deah boys."

"Use your own judgment, old chap," said Monty Lowther. "Don't allow your mighty brain to be governed by an inferior intellect!"

Arthur Augustus nodded.



"Will you come?" shouted Tom Merry, seizing Manners by the ankles and jerking him off the balustrade. "You ass!" roared Manners, as he bumped on the step. "You dangerous maniac!"

"Gussy, old chap," said Tom Merry, resisting the desire that seized him to smash D'Arcy's silk hat over his head, and speaking with a sweet smile, "you're going out with Blake & Co. this afternoon, are you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Anything on?"

"I am afraid I can't tell you that, Tom Mewwy! You see, it's a secwet!"

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther exchanged glances. They were on the track at last. Whatever was the secret plan planned in Study No. 6 it was to be put into effect that afternoon, and the four Fourth-Formers were leaving the school to do it.

"Of course, you haven't any secrets from us?" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yaas, there's something in that," he remarked.

"Then what is the wheeze?"

"Well, weally——"

"Gussy! Hallo, there! What's up now?"

It was Blake's voice. Jack Blake of Study No. 6 came quickly towards the seat under the elms, with an extremely suspicious expression upon his face.

"Gussy, come along!"

"Oh, it's all right!" said Tom Merry affably. "We're just having a little chat with D'Arcy, and——"

"Yes, you rotters, I know!" said Blake. "Come along, Gussy!"

"I wasn't tellin' them anything," said Arthur Augustus; "in fact, I had just informed Tom Mewwy that you specially told me not to tell them anything——"

"You—you—you—!"

"They advised me to use my own judgment, and I was just turnin' it ovah in my mind. But probably I should have told them nothin'!"

"Come along, Gussy!"

"I am quite comfy heah, thank you, Blake!"

"Possibly, but I'm not!" said Blake, seizing the swell of the School House by the shoulder, and jerking him off the seat. "Haven't you ever heard, ass, that a chap who wants to keep a secret shouldn't only hide the secret, but hide the fact that he has one—eh?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I suppose they would have wormed it all out of you in two minutes more!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Come along!"

"I wefuse!"

"Ass!"

"I absolutely wefuse to be chawactewised as an ass!"

"Will you come?"

"Weally—"

"Oh, come on!" roared Blake.

And he put his arm through that of the swell of the School House and marched him off.

Tom Merry and Lowther grinned at one another rather ruefully as Manners came strolling up to them.

"Nearly had it, Monty!"

"Very nearly," said Lowther. "Blake spoiled it all. No good trying to get anything out of Blake—he's canny Yorkshire, and you might as well try to draw an oyster!"

"Still, there's Herries and Dig."

"Yes, there's a chance there. But Dig's playing cricket, so we can't get at him. Herries is feeding his beastly bulldog. Let's have a shot at him."

"Come on! It's our last chance for solving the mystery—"

"I say, Tom Merry—"

"Don't stop—it's only that ass, Skimpole!" said Manners.

"Travel along, Skimpole, old chap—we're busy now!"

But Herbert Skimpole planted himself right in the path of the Terrible Three, and they had to stop.

"I want to speak to you—"

"Oh, go on!" said Tom Merry good-naturedly.

CHAPTER 3.

No News!

SKIMPOLE dived a hand into the breast-pocket of his jacket and drew forth a huge pocket-book, and felt behind his ear for a pencil. He wetted the pencil with his tongue and opened the notebook.

The chums of the Shell watched this proceeding curiously.

"I accidentally overheard your last remark, Manners," said Skimpole.

"Eh?" said Manners.

"You were speaking about solving a mystery—"

"Was I?"

"Yes, you were. Pray do not attempt to delude me—that is quite impossible with a fellow of my superior mental attainments. You were speaking of solving a mystery. I should be glad to lend you my assistance—free of cost to yourself."

Tom Merry laughed.

Skimpole, the brainy man of the Shell at St. Jim's, was a great believer in Determinism; but he also fancied himself as an amateur detective. There was nothing, in fact, to which he did not consider his brain equal—and, indeed, it was a very large brain, to judge by the size of his forehead, which was abnormal.

It was an open question in the School House whether Skimpole the Determinist or Skimpole the detective was the funnier merchant of the two.

"Solving a mystery is just in my line," said Skimpole. "If there is anything beyond the grasp of your average brains, my dear fellows, don't hesitate to engage my professional aid. I shall charge you nothing."

"My dear ass—"

"Come! Better let me have the details," said Skimpole, wetting his pencil again. "I have nothing particular to do this afternoon, except to write out a new chapter of my book, and I may as well take up this case."

Lowther grinned.

"Well, there's no harm in letting the ass into it," he remarked. "It's the Case of the Mysterious Hamper, Skimpole."

Skimpole jotted down in his notebook, in a sprawling hand: "Case of the Mysterious Hamper—Notes." Then he sucked his pencil again.

"Go on! Let me have all the details, please!"

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"The problem is—given a hamper—to find out what was in it when it was received by Blake from his uncle in America," said Tom Merry.

"Can you produce the hamper?"

"Yes! Lowther's got it in his waistcoat pocket!"

"Pray do not be funny, Merry. I am taking up this case seriously. If the hamper cannot be produced, that is an important point."

"The hamper is in the box-room in the School House. It was shoved there after Blake had unpacked it."

"I must examine the hamper, and probably I shall find a clue to the contents." Skimpole closed his notebook. "I will immediately proceed to the box-room, and I will let you know later the results of my investigations."

And Skimpole hurried off.

The chums of the Shell, grinning, resumed their way. The building where the pets of the St. Jim's boys were kept—known in the school as the "menagerie"—was behind the New House. The Terrible Three arrived there in a few minutes, and there, sure enough, they found Herries feeding his bulldog.

Herries' bulldog was as ugly-looking a brute as could have been found in the length and breadth of England, but its owner was all the prouder of it on this account. Herries had frequently got into trouble for keeping the bulldog in his study, against the House rules. But it was not only the masters who were down on the bulldog being introduced into Study No. 6. Blake, Digby, and D'Arcy unanimously backed up the authorities on that point.

"Hallo, Herries!" said Tom Merry blandly. "Feeding Towser, I see."

"Yes!" said Herries.

"Fine dog!" said Lowther.

"Jolly fine!"

"You ought to be proud of him!" said Manners.

"I am!"

"He's quite well, isn't he?" said Tom Merry.

"Quite! My dog is never ill. If he were ill, I should take him into the School House to look after him; and Blake and the rest could go hang!" said Herries.

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Tom Merry heartily. "Blake and the rest could go hang! What right have they to interfere with a fellow and his bulldog?"

"What right, indeed?" said Lowther.

"I should say so!" remarked Manners.

Herries looked at them.

"What are you gassing about?" he demanded. "I suppose Blake and Dig and D'Arcy as to they like without you chaps shoving your oar in, can't they?"

The Terrible Three smiled a sickly smile. This was rather discouraging. It seemed as difficult to soap Herries as to soap Digby.

"Yes, of course," said Tom Merry. "I don't say they're not right to refuse to have a bulldog in the study—"

"Don't you? Well, I do?"

"I agree with Herries," said Lowther, with a reproving glance at Tom Merry. "If a fellow can't keep a bulldog in his own study, in whose study can he keep it?"

"That's so," agreed Manners. "Herries is quite justified in sticking up for his rights."

"Look here, what are you getting at?" demanded Herries unexpectedly.

"Getting at!" repeated Manners, rather taken aback.

"Yes. What are you getting at? What's all this gas about, anyway? Blessed if I can see what you're driving at, unless you want to borrow something."

"If that's your idea of politeness, Herries—"

"Well, don't bother."

The chums of the Shell were silent. Herries went on feeding his bulldog, and the bulldog went on eating. There seemed to be no limit to Towser's capacity in that line.

"Are you going to take Towser out with you this afternoon?" asked Tom Merry, struck by a new idea.

Herries looked up quickly.

"Who told you we were going out this afternoon?" he asked.

"I thought you were."

"Well, then, don't you think about it," said Herries.

"Look here, Herries, it seems to me that you're looking for trouble," said Lowther, getting rather warm.

"Oh, rats!" said Herries.

"If you want a thick ear—"

"If you want Towser to take a lump out of you—"

"Oh, I say, we may as well be off!" said Tom Merry.

"No good staying here talking to this pig!"

"Well, no; and it's a bit below our dignity to hang about with Fourth-Formers," Manners remarked.

(Continued at foot of next page.)



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"I was just thinking so," observed Lowther. "We've got the position of the Shell to think of."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Herries.

The Terrible Three walked away. They were looking chagrined; they could not help it. The attempt to get the secret out of Herries had been a greater failure than the previous one. The only crumb of information they had received had been obtained from D'Arcy.

"The beast was on his guard," said Manners. "I suppose Blake has spoken to him and warned him that we were on the track."

"Shouldn't wonder."

"What I want to know is," said Lowther aggressively, "what's the good of Tom Merry's persuasive methods? Seems to me—"

"Oh, don't start grousing!" said Tom Merry. "We're not done yet. We know from Gussy that Blake's wheeze, whatever it is, is going to be carried out this afternoon, and that they're going away from St. Jim's to do it."

"That's so."

"Well, then, we've only got to watch them, and we shall be able to follow on their track and run them down to their giddy lair."

"Well, that ought to be easy enough," said Manners thoughtfully. "I suppose if we hang round the School House door we can't miss them going out?"

"That's the wheeze."

"Then let's get on the watch at once."

And the chums of the Shell returned to the School House, and sat in a row on the stone balustrade of the School House steps. It was pretty certain that the chums of Study No. 6 could not leave the House now without the three being aware of it.

CHAPTER 4.

Skimpole Investigates!

"**W**EALLY, Blake—"

"Oh, don't talk to me!" said Blake crossly. "You were going to let out the whole bag of tricks if I hadn't come up in time to stop you."

"I wefuse to admit that I should have let out the whole bag of twicks. I was goin' to use my own judgment about the mattah."

"And what do you mean by using your own judgment when you haven't got any? Ain't I the leader of this study?" demanded Blake excitedly.

"Well, yaas, that is certainly the case, deah boy; but weally—"

"But you're an ass, and you haven't sense enough to go in when it rains—"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as an ass! I uttiahly wefuse to submit to anythin' of the sort."

"Ass!"

"Unless you cease to apply that extwemely oppwobwious expwession to me, Blake, I shall have no alternative but to administrah a feahful thwashin', or else to dwop your fwendship."

"Dummy!"

"I wegard the term dummy as equally oppwobwious, and my wemarks apply to that term also. Upon the whole, I think I had bettah leave you till you are in a bettah tempah," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity. "I will wetiah fwom the study—"

"That you won't!"

"I beg your pardon, Blake!"

"You ought to; but you're not going out of this study until we're ready for the expedition to Rylcombe Wood," said Blake flatly. And he crossed to the door, locked it, and took out the key.

D'Arcy watched this proceeding through his eyeglass, with growing indignation in his countenance.

"What does this mean, Blake?" he asked, in his most stately manner.

"It means that you are not going out of this study."

"I wefuse to be kept a pwisonah!"

"You can refuse till you're black in the face," said Blake. "I don't mind you refusing, as far as that goes; but you're not going out of this study till we're ready for the expedition."

"Blake, I wegard this conduct as unfwiedly!"

"I don't mind."

"I shall dwop your acquaintance—"

"Go hon!"

"I wegard you as a wude wottah!"

"You can regard me as anything you like, Gussy; but I'm not going to have our little secret gassed all over the School House," said Blake. "It won't be long now. Those duffers ought to be here. Get the straps fastened round that bag while you're waiting."

"I wefuse to fasten the stwaps wound that bag!"

"Then don't!"

"Pway unlock that door, Blake!"

"Rats!"

"I twust," said D'Arcy, with emphasis, as he slightly pushed back his immaculate cuffs, "I twust you will not compel me to pwceed to violence!"

Blake grinned.

"If you want to be used as a duster, Gussy, I'm just in the humour for you," he said. "Come on, and I'll wipe up the floor with you!"

"I shall be sowwy to use violence towards a gentleman whom I have always regarded as a friend," said D'Arcy slowly. "But my dig demands it in this case. Unless you immediately open the door, I shall have no alternative but to thwash you!"

There was a sound at the door of a hand trying it, and then a powerful kick on the lower panel.

"Open this beastly door! What the dickens have you got this rotten door locked for?"

It was the voice of Digby. Blake unlocked the door and opened it, and Digby entered the study in his cricketer things, with his bat under his arm, and looking amazed.

"What the dickens—"

"You've come just in time!" gasped Blake.

"Just in time for what?"

"To save me from being pulverised. Gussy was going to give me a fearful thrashing if I didn't unlock the door, and I wasn't going to unlock it. He—"

"I should have been sowwy to use violence," said D'Arcy. "But my dig—"

"He wants to go and blab about our little game all over the school!" exclaimed Blake. "He nearly let it out to those rotters in the Shell—"

"Weally, Blake!"

"So I was keeping him confined as a dangerous lunatic—"

"I refuse to be alluded to as a dangewous lunatic!"

"The rotters know there's something on," said Digby. "Because we've kept dark what was in the hamper, I suppose."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"They'll be watching us, I suppose," said Blake. "Have you seen Herries? He can't be still batting."

"No; he was out before me. He's gone to feed that beastly bulldog of his."

"They'll be trying to pump him, too, and he's an ass—"

"Is he?" said Herries, coming into the study. "Not such an ass as some people."

"My dear chap, you're getting mixed. You should say not such an ass as some person. Some people is plural."

"Well, that sounds wrong, anyway!" said Digby. "You should say some people are plural."

"If you're going to start teaching me grammar, Digby—"

"Well, you could do with it. But to come back to the topic, Herries is an ass, and I expect Tom Merry has been pumping him."

"They've been trying to soap me," grinned Herries; "but it wouldn't work. I saw them sitting in a row outside the House as I came in."

Blake frowned.

"Watching for us, of course."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We shall have to shift them, somehow," said Blake thoughtfully. "If they followed us when we left the school, they would get on to the wheeze at once."

"I don't see how—"

Digby stopped as the door was pushed a little wider open, and a large head and a pair of spectacles came in view from the passage.

Skimpole blinked at the chums of Study No. 6.

"Ah, I did not know you were here! I—"

"Well, now you know, you can travel farther on," said Blake kindly. "We haven't any time for Determinism now."

"I am not thinking of Determinism at the present moment," said Skimpole. "I am pursuing the avocation of—"

"You are pursuing what?"

"The avocation—"

"What is that—some animal?"

"My dear Blake—"

"Well, go on pursuing it, old fellow. Don't let us detain you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I am pursuing the avocation of an amateur detective," said Skimpole, unheeding. "I have had a case put into my hands by Tom Merry—"

"Then get on with it, Skimmy, and don't waste time talking," said Digby.

"I have examined the hamper in the box-room—"

"What!" roared Blake.

"I have examined the hamper in the box-room—"

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"What are you investigating for Tom Merry, then?"

"The case of the mysterious hamper. I have examined the hamper in the box-room, and have come to the conclusion—"

"What have you discovered by examining the hamper?" asked Blake, his hand sliding towards a round, ebony ruler on the table.

"Nothing," said Skimpole. "I confess that, with my—my unusual brain power, I have discovered nothing by my examination of the hamper. This is undoubtedly owing to the fact that the hamper is empty. But, of course, I am able to make a deduction from the facts that I have discovered nothing. It is evident to me that you have concealed whatever it was that the hamper contained, and that therefore there is some dark secret—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You may laugh now, Blake, but it will turn out to be no laughing matter for you, I expect. The best thing you can do is to confess."

Blake stared.

"Confess what?"

"The guilty secret. If your uncle in America has committed a murder—"

"A what?"

"A murder, and hidden the body in a hamper, and sent it to England to escape the consequences of his crime, and you have buried it somewhere in the quad—"

"My only hat!"

"I know that your uncle lives on a ranch in Wyoming, and that people who live on ranches frequently shoot one another," said Skimpole. "I have read all about that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no laughing matter."

"My dear Skimmy, if you go to stories for your facts, you will be bound to succeed as a detective," said Blake solemnly. "As a matter of fact, the hamper contained several dead bodies."

Skimpole took out his notebook and opened it.

"It is really better to make a clean breast of the matter," he remarked, vetting the point of his pencil. "Please let me have the details."

"Shall we tell him everything, chaps?" asked Blake, looking round solemnly.

"Better own up," said Digby.

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "No good trying to keep anything hidden when that deadly blughound is on the track!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Very well, then," said Blake resignedly; "there were three dead bodies in the hamper. Got that down, Skimmy?"

"Certainly. Go on!"

"They were closely packed in cottonwool, and tied up with pink ribbon."

Skimpole looked up.

"The bodies were all there with the exception of the legs, arms, and trunks, which had evidently been cut off by the dastardly assassin."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Digby.

Skimpole closed his book with a bang.

"If you are going to be funny, Blake—"

"I'm perfectly serious," said Blake. "The hamper also contained a large quantity of stolen jewellery, tastefully stained with blood, and a couple of missing wills. The rest of the contents were—"

"I shall continue to investigate this case," said Skimpole. "You cannot put me off the scent in this manner. I've given you a chance to confess—"

"Well, haven't I done it?"

"Now the law will have to take its course," said Skimpole majestically. And he walked out of the study.

The chums of Study No. 6 chuckled gleefully.

"Tom Merry is welcome to all the information he can get from Skimpole," grinned Blake. "But it's a bit more serious about their sitting on the steps outside and watching for us to go out. We shall have to shift them somehow. By Jove, I've got it!"

"Got what?"

"The way to do it. Figgins & Co."

"What about Figgins & Co.?"

"Come on, and you'll see."

And Blake led the way from the School House, followed by his somewhat mystified chums.

CHAPTER 5.

On the Watch!

TOM MERRY, Manners, and Lowther were still sitting in a row on the stone balustrade outside the School House when the chums of the Fourth came out. They seemed to be deeply interested in a conversation they were holding among themselves, and did not observe the Fourth-Formers. Blake was pretty certain that

it was all humbug, however, and he bestowed a glare upon them as he came out. Manners was speaking, and he went on without changing his tone.

"If Monty had moved up his rook, it wouldn't have made the slightest difference. You see, my queen's bishop was at rook's fourth."

"Now look here, Monty——"

"Look here, Manners——"

"Talking chess—eh?" said Blake, stopping and fixing a basilisk eye on the chums of the Shell.

"Yes," said Tom Merry genially. "Manners and Lowther are playing an old game over again. Manners had Lowther checkmate in three moves, and Lowther had Manners checkmate in four moves, so the result would have been interesting, as well as something novel, only I mated them both by upsetting the chess-table."

in! You're sitting here like a lot of crows on a fence to watch for us."

"It's a guilty conscience, I suppose," Tom Merry remarked. "You know you'll not bear watching, and so——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"If I had moved up my rook, I should have——"

"You'd have had it whipped off by my queen's bishop——"

"Oh, blow your queen's bishop!"

"Oh, come on, kids," said Blake, "I can't stand this piffle!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Fourth-Formers went down the steps. Tom Merry slipped off the balustrade, but Manners and Lowther did not move. They had commenced that chess argument in order to keep up an appearance of being interested in matters of their own when the four Fourth-Formers came



"Come on, chaps!" said Tom Merry. "Rush the rotters!" The Terrible Three tried in vain to avoid the New House trio, and in a moment the six juniors were grasping one another and staggering to and fro in the dusty lane in breathless combat.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should have fixed Lowther in the next move!"

"I had Manners already fixed."

"Only thinking about chess—eh?" said Blake pleasantly.

"Not sitting on this balustrade to watch for anybody to come out of the School House?"

Tom Merry looked amazed.

"My dear chap," he exclaimed, "what on earth should we want to sit on this balustrade for to watch for anybody to come out of the School House?"

"You might be watching for us?"

"Nonsense! You exaggerate your importance in the House, my boy!" said Tom Merry very loftily.

"Do you mean to say you weren't watching for us?" demanded Blake.

"I don't mean to say anything."

"If you had moved up your rook——" said Manners.

"Oh, stop that piffle!" said Blake. "You can't take me

out. But they had already grown excited over it. It was an old question which could never be quite settled, as Tom Merry had upset the chess-table before the game was finished, and the two contestants could not agree exactly as to where the pieces had been.

"Come on, you chaps!" said Tom Merry.

"If I had moved up my rook——"

"You couldn't have moved up your rook!"

"I tell you——"

"And I tell you——"

"I had you mated in three——"

"Bosh! I had you mated in four——"

"Will you come?" shouted Tom Merry, seizing Manners by the ankles and jerking him off. "Now then!"

"You ass!" roared Manners, as he bumped on the step.

"You've nearly broken my bones, you dangerous maniac!"

"Serve you right for chattering chess when your lawful

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lord and master is calling you!" said Tom Merry severely. "Now then, Monty!"

He turned to Monty Lowther to serve him in the same way, but Monty jumped down in time.

Manners rubbed himself ruefully.

"All the same, I had Lowther mate in three——"

"I had you mate in four——"

"Shut up! We've got to checkmate Study No. 6 in one," said Tom Merry. "Follow your uncle and stop arguing!"

The Terrible Three went down the steps. Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were crossing the quadrangle. Blake was carrying a large travelling-bag in his hand, and Herries had a portmanteau, and Digby a bundle with straps round it. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy carried nothing but a light cane.

"They're going out, and they've got their props with them," said Tom Merry. "I'll wager that what they're carrying is what was in the hamper."

"Most likely."

"They're going out—— By Jove, they're not, though! They're going to the New House," said Tom Merry, looking extremely puzzled.

"So they are, by Jove!"

"Is it possible that they're going to take Figgins & Co. into the wheeze, and leave us out?" exclaimed Manners, in amazement.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Not likely! They're more up against the New House than they are against us. I don't quite catch on."

"There! They're talking to Figgins!"

"Yes, I can see they are!"

The Terrible Three watched their rivals in surprise and doubt. Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn—otherwise known as Figgins & Co.—had come off the cricket field, and were still in their white flannels. Blake had stopped them when he came up to the group of New House juniors, and was talking to Figgins in the most friendly way.

"Blessed if I understand it!" said Tom Merry.

"Figg's looking at us," said Lowther, as the eye of the chief of the New House juniors was turned upon him.

"Blake's telling him about it, I suppose."

"Anyway, they're not going out without us knowing!" said Tom Merry determinedly. "Let's get down to the gates, and we can wait there for them."

"Right you are!"

The Terrible Three walked down to the gates. They glanced back as they reached the old stone arch, and saw that Figgins & Co., and the chums of Study No. 6 were looking after them, and laughing.

CHAPTER 6.

Figgins Lends a Hand!

"FIGGY, old son——" That was how Jack Blake greeted the New House junior when he spoke to him, and Figgins looked at him suspiciously.

"What's the little game?" he demanded. "You're growing remarkably affectionate all of a sudden."

Blake laughed.

"I want you chaps to do me a favour," he said.

Fatty Wynn was already glancing at the bags the Fourth-Formers were carrying. There was a greedy glimmer in the eyes of Fatty Wynn.

"I think I can understand what you mean, Blake," he remarked, "and we'll be very pleased indeed. I can answer for myself, anyway."

"Can you?" said Blake, staring. "You must be a blessed thought-reader to know what I want you to do, anyway."

Fatty Wynn chuckled.

"Oh, as soon as I saw those bags, I guessed!"

"Did you?" said Blake, rather grimly.

"Yes. You're going to have a picnic in the woods, and you want us to come along with you," said Fatty Wynn genially. "And I, for one, wouldn't think of refusing."

"Catch Fatty refusing a feed," grinned Figgins. "But I think you're a bit wide of the mark this time, Fatty."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I fancy so," said Blake. "There's no picnic on this time. It's not grub we've got in these bags. Sorry if I've made your mouth water, Fatty."

Fatty Wynn looked extremely disappointed.

"I don't see what you wanted to come hinting at a picnic for if you're not giving one," he grunted. "It's not fair to me."

"I didn't hint at it."

"Well, that's how I understood you, anyway. I think that, under the circumstances, the least you can do is to stand a feed in the school shop."

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"Oh, cheese it, Fatty!" said Kerr. "Anybody would think we starved you in the New House, from the way you go about like a ravening wolf."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I seldom get enough to eat," said Fatty. "I get so hungry in this June weather, too. I've been playing cricket since dinner, and I had very little dinner, only a couple of cold veal and ham pies, besides the dinner in the Hall, and a few tarts and cakes afterwards at the tuckshop."

"Poor chap! You must be famished," said Blake sympathetically. "There was a sardine left in our study after tea yesterday. It fell on the floor somewhere, and we forgot to pick it up. You can go and look for it if you like, and if you find it you can have it—all of it."

"Bai Jove——"

"What are those Shell bounders watching us for?" asked Figgins, noticing the Terrible Three at this point. "Is anything on?"

"That's it," grinned Blake. "That's what I was going to ask you, Figgins. Will you do me a favour—something quite in your line, and up against those Shell bounders? You ought to stand by your own Form against the Shell, though you belong to that measly New House."

"That what?"

"That ancient and honourable branch of the college of St. James," said Blake.

"That's better. Well, we don't mind lending you kids a helping hand," said Figgins condescendingly. "What trouble are you in now?"

"Those Shell bounders know we are going out on a little expedition, and they've got a wheeze of tracking us down like a set of giddy detectives."

"Oh, I see!"

"They're going down to the gate now," said Kerr.

"Yes, they're going down there to wait for us to go out."

"You want us to stop them?" asked Figgins.

Jack Blake nodded.

"Yes, rather! You could do it easily. Follow us out of the gate, and when those rotters start after us, go for them. Wipe up the road with them, and sock into them. Let them have it fairly in the neck. Anything you like, so long as they don't follow on our track."

"Right you are!" grinned Figgins. "But what's the wheeze? What are they following you around for?"

"That's a little secret."

"Oh, keep your giddy secret! We'll stop those rotters, if you like. It will be one up against the School House, anyway."

"One up against the Shell Form, you mean."

"Oh, put it how you like!" said Figgins. "We'll do it."

"Good! We'll do as much for you some time," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I should be most happy to do anything in my power to return this great favah Figgins is doin' us," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "If you evah want any instuction in ewicket, eithah battin' or bowling, I shall be vevy pleased to put you up to a w'inkle, Figgins."

Figgins glared at the obliging swell of the School House.

"Thank you, Gussy! And if at any time you particularly want a thick ear, just come over and repeat your offer."

"Weally, Figgins——"

"Oh, ring off, ass!"

"I wufese to wing off, and I decline to be called an ass. Blake, stop pulling my arm! I decline to leave this spot until Figgins has apologised."

"Do you?" said Blake. "Take his other arm, Herries."

"Right-ho!"

"Pway welsease me!"

"Thank you very much, Figgy! We rely on you. Now come on, chaps, and sprint!"

The chums of Study No. 6 sprinted towards the gates. D'Arcy had to go with them, whether he liked it or not. They passed out into Rylcombe Lane, and, as they expected, found the Terrible Three sitting on the fence opposite in a row waiting for them.

"There they are," said Blake, with a sniff. "Sitting up in the crow line again. Never mind, we can depend on Figgins."

"Yaas, wathah! Upon the whole, as he is goin' to do us this favah, I will not thwash Figgins."

The Fourth-Formers walked down the lane. The Terrible Three slipped from the fence. At the same moment Figgins & Co. came out of the gate, and stopped in the path of the chums of the Shell.

"Hold on!" said Figgins blandly.

Tom Merry stared at him.

"What do you want?"

"Nothing."

"Get out of the way, then."

"Sorry; but it can't be did!"

"Don't be an ass, Figgins!" said Tom Merry. "We're in a hurry. We're not looking for a House row just now."

"Then you've found one without looking for it," grinned Figgins.

Tom Merry frowned. As a rule he did not go about avoiding House rows. But just now the forms of the chums of Study No. 6 were disappearing down the lane, and he saw the discovery of the secret growing more and more difficult as they vanished.

"Now, look here, Figgins, we're in a hurry."

"Are you really?"

"Let us pass, you silly rotters!" broke out Lowther.

"By Jupiter, if you don't get out of the way we'll wipe up the road with you!"

"Good!" said Figgins. "Start the wiping! We're waiting for it!"

"Yearning for it," said Kerr.

"Rather!" grinned Fatty Wynn.

"Get out of the way!"

"Rats!"

"Come on, chaps!" said Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three rushed on. They tried to avoid the New House trio, but Figgins & Co. were not to be avoided. In a moment more the six juniors were grasping one another, and staggering to and fro in the dusty lane in breathless combat.

"Good old Figgy!" Blake exclaimed. "They're at it. It doesn't matter which side gets licked. We're all right now. Let's cut through the wood here, and Tom Merry will never be able to find the track."

The chums of Study No. 6 disappeared into the dusky depths of the wood. Meanwhile, Figgins & Co. and the Terrible Three were having a terrific tussle.

The New House juniors were determined to keep their word to Blake, and the chums of the Shell were determined to pass, and so there could not fail to be a really terrific encounter. The clouds of dust that arose from the trampling feet formed a sort of veil round the combatants,

in the midst of which they wrestled and struggled and gasped, with red faces and panting breath.

"You rotters—"

"You asses—"

"School House cads—"

"New House beasts!"

"You're not going to pass—"

"Yes, we are!"

"Yah!"

"Rats!"

These and other complimentary expressions were jerked out from time to time as the juniors swayed and wrestled. Upon the whole, weight was on the side of the chums of the Shell. Fatty Wynn was the first down. He went down with his back in the dust, and Manners sitting on his chest, and Fatty wriggled and gasped.

"Now, then, are you giving in?" demanded Manners.

"No!" gasped Fatty Wynn, with true Welsh determination never to admit that he was beaten. "No, I don't!"

"Then I'll sit on your chest till you do!" said Manners.

Kerr was down next, and Lowther sat on him to keep him there. Tom Merry and Figgins were wrestling desperately, but Figgins' foot slipped at last, and he was over. Down he went, and Tom Merry pinned him down there with his knee.

"Done you!" gasped the hero of the Shell.

"Rotter!"

"Beast!"

Figgins burst into a gasping laugh. Figgins always knew how to take an adverse turn of fortune cheerfully.

"Yes, we've done!" he gasped. "We'll make it pax if you will, Merry. We've stopped you, anyway, and you'll never get on the track after all this time, and that's what we wanted."

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"It's pax, kids!"

The struggle ceased. Looking extremely dusty and dishevelled, the juniors rose out of the dusty lane, and grinned ruefully at one another.

(Continued on next page.)



Boundary!

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"Well, you are a nice set of scarecrows, and no mistake!" said Monty Lowther, looking round.

"What price yourself?" demanded Kerr. "You wouldn't exactly take a beauty prize at this moment."

"Well, we've licked you New House wasters—"

"That you haven't," said Kerr promptly. "Figgins made it pax because he took pity on you. If you like to start again we're ready."

"Oh, rats!"

"What I say is—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tom Merry. "We've all had enough, I think. I feel as if I had been through a mowing-machine, and Figgins wouldn't fetch tuppence from any rag merchant who knew his business. I suppose Blake & Co. put you asses up to this, didn't they?"

Figgins grinned. "We promised to stop you if you followed them," he remarked, "and we've done it."

"Yes, you ass, and now we shan't be able to get on to the jape. I suppose you know all about it, though—what those kids have got on this afternoon."

"Yes, Blake had flannels, and D'Arcy a silk hat, and—"

"Don't be an ass! I mean, the wheeze they have got on."

"No, we don't know."

"You might have found out if you'd joined us instead of going for us like a set of lunatics!" said Tom Merry. "Now it's too late."

"May be a chance yet," said Lowther. "Let's go on and see."

"Come on, then!"

The Terrible Three ran on up the lane to look for traces of the Fourth-Formers, and Figgins & Co. looked at one another. Figgins was looking very thoughtful.

"There's something in what Tom Merry says," he remarked. "If Blake has some wheeze on, we ought to get on to it. It seems to me that we've been rather done by that boulder Blake, come to think of it."

And the Co. nodded assent.

CHAPTER 7.

The Redskins!

JACK BLAKE halted under the foliage of the great beech-trees, and threw down his bag upon the thick, rich grass.

"This place will about suit us," he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Lonely enough," observed Digby, looking round.

The spot did, indeed, seem lonely. It was in the heart of the wood, where the great trees grew thickly with intertwined branches, round a small, ferny glade. In the glade stood the ruins of an old forester's hut, tumbling to decay. The spot was far removed from the haunts of men; but it was well known to the St. Jim's juniors. They had helped, on a never-to-be-forgotten occasion, to capture a desperate character who had taken refuge in that ruined hut.

"Good!" said Herries. "We shan't be spotted here. I say, I wish we had brought my bulldog."

"I don't," said Blake.

"No feah! We don't wequiah a beastlay bulldog now, Hewwies, old man. That beast of yours is a nice animal to keep away fwom, as a mattah of fact."

"A lot you know about bulldogs," said Herries disdainfully. "Besides, we ought to have him to keep watch for us, in case we're surprised here."

"If anybody surprises us, he'll get surprised himself when we get our warpaint on!" chuckled Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake commenced to unstrap the bag.

"Let's get to business," he remarked. "It will take us some time to get up in the Indian rig, and—"

"My hat! I forgot to bring a looking-glass!"

"That is all wight, Blake."

"No, it isn't! How are we to make up without a looking-glass?"

"What I mean is, I've got one in my pocket," said Arthur Augustus, opening a little leather case. "I nevah twavel without my pocket miwwah."

Blake grinned.

"Well, even a silly ass may be of some use sometimes," he remarked. "Stick it on that tree, Gussy."

"I object to that wemark."

"Go on objecting, then. Stick the glass on that tree. Here are the things. Don't they look ripping?"

"By Jove! Yes."

Any casual observer would certainly have been astonished by the contents of the bags, now they were turned out on the grass.

The mysterious hamper, which had excited so much curiosity at St. Jim's, had been known to contain a present for Blake from his uncle on a Western American ranch. But what the present was, only the chums of Study No. 6 knew, and they had kept the secret.

Blake's uncle was a believer in outdoor training, and he had sent his nephew a present that Jack valued probably more than anything else he could have received. It was a complete outfit of Red Indian garb, and weapons and warpaint. The sight of them had filled the hearts of the Fourth-Formers with delight, and they had waited for the first half-holiday for a chance to carry out their plans. To garb themselves as Redskins and camp in the woods was a novel and attractive idea.

The Head's permission had first been obtained, and Dr. Holmes, after some thought, had given in. The present adventure was only an experiment, and the chums of Study No. 6 hoped to obtain permission later for a more extensive excursion, camping out for several days at a time.

Blake lifted up a pair of leggings adorned with beads and coloured feathers, with moccasins to match. His eyes danced as he looked at them.

"Ripping!" he exclaimed.

"Got the paint there?" asked Digby.

"Yes, and plenty of it."

"Bai Jove! Are you thinkin' of paintin' our faces, Blake?"

"Yes, ass! How would white faces go with Indian clothes?"

"Yaas! But I say—"

"What's the trouble now?"

"I was thinkin' about my complexion—"

"Hang your complexion!"

"That's all vewy well, Blake, but I can't put on my face anythin' that would be likely to damage the skin. I'm expectin' my Cousin Ethel down soon at St. Jim's, and I don't want her to see me lookin' a fwight!"

"Why not? It wouldn't be anything new."

"Wewally, Blake, I object to that wemark. If you mean to imply that I have looked a fwight on pwevious occasions, I can only say—"

"Rats!"

"I can only say—"

Potts, the Office Boy!



"Oh, ring off, Gussy! Life's too short for all your remarks. The paint won't hurt your face, and it doesn't matter if it does. Surely that's enough to satisfy any reasonable mortal!"

"Oh, vewy well!"

"Exactly. Get on with the washing!"

"But surely we haven't to wash our faces before puttin' the paint on?"

"Ass!"

"We shall wash them aftahwards!"

"I mean, get to business!" roared Blake.

"Oh, weally! If you'd say what you mean, Blake, it would save a gweat deal of time."

"Get your things off, kids," said Blake. "Better shove them into the hut for safety. It would be no joke if somebody came along and collared them while we were dressed up as Redskins."

"Ha, ha, ha! You're right!"

"Nobody's likely to come along here," said Herries.

"But I wish I'd brought my bulldog. He'd have guarded the clothes."

"So he would. You can go and fetch him if you like," said Blake affably.

To which remark Herries deigned no reply. It was a walk of three miles to St. Jim's. The juniors removed their outer clothing, and the garments were placed inside the ruined hut. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, carefully folded his trousers and waistcoat and jacket, and laid his silk hat tenderly on the pile.

Then the metamorphosis commenced.

The juniors drew on the Indian garments, which fitted them, as Digby said, where they touched. But Blake remarked that you couldn't expect a Bond Street fit in Redskin's garments, which was certainly true.

Blake's uncle had sent him an outfit for a dozen young Redskins, but only sufficient for four had been brought along by the chums of Study No. 6. If others were to be admitted to the wheeze, that would come later, and then the rest of the outfits would come in useful. There were spears in sections, which the juniors now fitted together, and blunt tomahawks and knives for scalping purposes.

It was not an easy task to array themselves in Indian garb for the first time. But they finished at last, lending each other assistance with the unaccustomed garments. D'Arcy's little mirror was not of much use for viewing the tout ensemble, but it came in useful when they commenced to paint their faces. Daubed with red and yellow ochre, the four juniors gradually assumed a ferocious aspect calculated to strike terror into the hearts of their enemies.

"My only hat!" said Blake, staring at Digby when he had finished. "If it wasn't for your hair parted on one side I should take you for a giddy Indian out of Buffalo Bill's show!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You look the same except for your ears!"

"What's the matter with my ears?"

"Well, as a rule, Red Indians don't have white ears."

"My hat! I'd forgotten them! Give them a touch for me, will you?"

"How do I look, deah boys?"

"Ripping, Gussy! You look ever so much better with the paint on your face—it hides your real appearance splendidly, and, of course, that's an improvement."

"Weally, Blake—"

"You would frighten a wooden image with that chivvy

now, Gussy. But you haven't got your hair done in the proper Blackfoot style."

"I'm goin' to put on a head-dress, you know."

"Yes; but you must have your hair done first. You can't leave that nobby little curl over the forehead."

"I don't want that curl intahfeahed with, Blake. I am afraid that the effect of it would be spoiled, and I want to look nice when my cousin—"

"You can't spoil the effect of this Redskin business simply for the sake of looking nice when your cousin comes to St. Jim's."

"But weally, Blake—"

"I'll daub some grease on that curl and twist it the other way."

"You will do nothin' of the sort—"

"Hands off that curl!" grinned Digby. "Gussy puts that in pins every night to keep it in shape, and it mustn't be touched by sacrilegious hands."

"Digby, that is an absolute untwuth!"

Blake jammed the grease on D'Arcy's favourite curl, and the swell of the School House gave a yelp.

"Blake, you howwid beast!"

"There! It looks ever so much better now, and much more like a Blackfoot."

"I weally—"

"Now stick on the feathers and you'll be all right."

The painting having been done, the head-dresses were the next and last item. The work was done at last, and the four young Redskins, as natural as life, stood and looked at one another admiringly.

"Ripping!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My word! I never thought we could rig up anything quite so good as this!" said Digby, squinting into the little mirror. "We could give a fright to any keeper who happened to come along just now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are we goin' to do, deah boys? When we get tired of lookin' at one another, it seems to me—"

"What do Redskins usually do in a wood?" demanded Blake. "We're going on the warpath, of course."

"Yaas. But whom are we going to attack, deah boy?"

Blake looked thoughtful, wrinkling up the red ochre on his brow.

"H'm! I'm rather sorry those Shell bounders couldn't track us down, now we're ready for them," he remarked.

"I should like to tackle them now."

"Bai Jove, wathah!"

"That's not the way for an Indian to talk," said Blake severely. "Did you ever hear a Redskin in the Rocky Mountains lisp like that, ass?"

"But I've nevah been in the Wocky Mountains, Blake."

"You are a Redskin now, though, and you've got to learn to speak like one, or else get a thick ear—I mean, or else get scalped!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop that cackling, Dig! Indians scalp one another when they get waxy, as you know perfectly well. Let my brothers follow me."

Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy stared at Blake as though they thought he had suddenly become demented.

"What did you say, deah boy?" said Arthur Augustus at last.

"Let my brothers follow me on the warpath."

"What warpath?"



PRESERVED FISH!

"Ass! I mean, silly coyote, I'm going to find one!"
 "Where are your brothers?" said Dig. "And what are you talking about, anyway? You haven't any brothers at St. Jim's."

"Ass! Indians always talk like that!"

"Like what?"

"Like that!" roared Blake. "Instead of saying: 'Buzz along, you silly cuckoos!' they say: 'Let my brothers follow me.'"

"Do they?" said Digby doubtfully.

"Yes, they do."

"But supposing they haven't any brothers?" asked Herries, who was certainly a trifle dense.

Blake gave him a withering look.

"It's a term they use," he explained, with laborious patience. "They call all the other chaps their brothers."

"But if the other chaps are not their brothers, it's not true."

"It's a way they have."

"Well, I don't see what they want to tell lies for!" said Herries obstinately.

"Then take my word for it, ass! Let my brothers follow me on the warpath," said Blake. "We will raid the ranches of the dastardly palefaces!"

"The what?"

"The dastardly palefaces who have stolen the prairies of our forefathers."

"Look here, Blake, if you're getting at us, say so! You know perfectly well that there aren't any prairies in Sussex."

"Herries, old man, if you find yourself dead some time in a corner somewhere, you'll know the reason!" said Blake darkly. "Just you follow me, and don't argue!"

"I don't want to argue, but when you want to make out that there are prairies in Sussex I think it's time to—"

"Let the braves of the Blackfeet follow their chief!"

"Ugh!" said Digby.

His three companions looked at him quickly.

"What's the matter?" asked Blake.

"Nothing," said Dig.

"What were you grunting for, then?"

"Yaas, wathah! Just explain that, Dig, deah boy! If there's nothin' the mattah, what the deuce were you gwuntin' for, you know?"

"You lot of silly asses—"

"Weally, Dig—"

"That's an Indian mode of talk," said Digby condescendingly. "Of course, you don't know much about Red Indians. They always say 'Ugh!'"

"What do they do it for?" asked Herries.

"Blessed if I know!"

"Well, I'm not going about grunting like a pig!" said Herries. "You can do the grunting for both of us, Dig, if you think it's the proper thing."

"Yaas, wathah! I am weally afraid that it would injuah my throat if I were to gwunt in that ridiculous mannah."

"Oh, come on!" said Blake. "I mean, let the braves of the Blackfeet follow their chief on the warpath! I am waiting for my brothers to follow me on the trail of the dastardly palefaces!"

"Wrong!" said Digby.

"What do you mean, Dig?"

"Red Indians don't speak in the first person. They never say 'I.' They always use the third person."

"Yes; so they do. Make it the third person, chaps."

"Rot!" said Herries.

"What do you mean by 'rot'?"

"Well, it was arranged that this affair was to be strictly among ourselves, without any third person being let into it—"

"Ass!"

"You can call me names, if you like, but I object to any third person."

"Villain, I was speaking grammatically!"

"I never said you were speaking ungrammatically. What I say is that we ought to think over it carefully before we let any third person into the business at all."

"Herries, old man, you'll make my hair grey!" said Blake pathetically. "I mean that I was speaking in a grammatical sense. It's a grammatical third person I'm alluding to—the third person in pronouns."

"I don't see why you couldn't have said that at first instead of wasting time like this!" said Herries.

"Oh, come on!" said Blake resignedly. "The Blackfoot chief is waiting for his warriors to follow him on the warpath against the base palefaces! That's all correct, Dig?"

"Yes; that's all right."

"Come on, then! Hush!"

Blake broke off suddenly as his quick ear detected a sound in the deep wood. He waved his hand quickly to his followers.

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"Cover—quick!"

The juniors understood, and, with a swiftness worthy of real Indians, they darted into cover in the thickets just as Tom Merry came into sight.

CHAPTER 8.

Put to Flight!

TOM MERRY came along carelessly enough, with his hands in his pockets. Lowther and Manners were a few paces behind, and as unconcerned as their leader. It was evident that they had not the slightest suspicion of an ambush in that remote recess of the shady old wood.

The Terrible Three had cleaned themselves somewhat after the encounter with Figgins & Co., but they still showed signs of the terrific combat. The signs were as thick in their faces as in their clothes, and Blake & Co. chuckled as they noted it.

Tom Merry stopped as he came in sight of the old hut, half-hidden by the ferns and grasses, and glanced at his companions.

"That's the place, kids!"



"Yes; there it is," said Lowther. "And nobody there, as I expected."

"Well, you couldn't tell. It struck me that they might have been going to have a picnic here," said Tom Merry mildly. "As we were out for the afternoon, there wasn't any harm in strolling this way and looking, anyway."

"Quite right!" said Manners. "But it's pretty certain they're not here, all the same. We should have heard or seen something of them as we came up."

"My idea all along was that they had gone to the ruined castle," said Lowther.

"I suppose they're there as they're not here," Tom Merry observed. "May as well glance into the hut, though. They may have spotted us coming, and might be lying low."

"I don't see why they should lie low when there are three of us and four of them."

"There's the secret, Monty. If we come upon them we shall spot them, anyway."

"Blessed if I'm not beginning to think that there isn't any secret at all!" said Monty Lowther. "Suppose they have only been rotting us from start to finish?"

"I don't think that's likely."

"Well, I'm beginning to think so."

"In that case, what did the hamper from America contain?"

"Oh, it might have contained anything! And those wasters would make a mystery about it for the sake of rotting us!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"There's something more in it than that, Monty."

"I should like to know what it is, then."

"So should I. We're going to find out. If this place is drawn blank we'll go on to the old castle; and if they're

"Bai Jove, they'll have a fidget!"

Blake chuckled softly.

"If they don't pelt off like champion sprinters, you can use my head for a footer," he murmured. "What do you think, Dig?"

"My word, they're bound to be startled! They'll buzz off!"

"Rather!" said Herries.

"Now, then, ready?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then yell, and follow your uncle!"

Jack Blake leaped to his feet with an ear-splitting yell. It may not have been in exact accordance with the customs of the Blackfoot Indians, but it was certainly discordant and hideous enough to do credit to any Indian tribe. His comrades were not far behind him. Yelling ferociously, they leaped from the thicket and charged at the Terrible Three.

The chums of the Shell swung towards them at the sound of the yell.

Then they stood petrified.

The sight of four savage, war-painted Redskins in an English wood was startling enough; but when those Redskins were charging with earsplitting yells and brandished tomahawks, it was small wonder if the chums of the Shell were dismayed, and it would have been a miracle if they had not run for it.

They did run for it.

For one moment they stood spellbound, and then they dashed off with one accord, running for their lives.

"Run!" gasped Tom Merry.

But the word was not needed.

Lowther and Manners were running their hardest, and they kept pace with Tom Merry, and in a twinkling the three chums were vanishing in the wood.

Loud and savage rang the Redskin yell again.

"After them!" gasped Blake.

And after them went the pseudo Blackfeet, tearing through the bushes and letting out a ferocious yell at every step.

Blake caught sight of Tom Merry in the underwood, and hurled his tomahawk.

He took care to miss the hero of the Shell by a couple of feet or so, and the weapon hurtled past Tom Merry, and struck against the trunk of a tree and fell quivering to the ground.

Tom Merry saw it, and if he had any doubts as to the reality of the danger, he could have none now.

The chums of the Shell tore madly on, and crashed through the underwood in frantic style.

Blake came gasping to a halt.

"Hold on, I can't run any more! Hold on!"

He was laughing too much to run. He stopped and threw himself down on the greensward, and laughed and laughed till the tears of merriment made furrows through the paint on his cheeks.

Digby reeled against a tree, laughing as if his ribs would crack, and Herries staggered into a bush, overcome with merriment.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat down on a root of a tree and doubled up with uncontrollable laughter.

There was no danger of the Terrible Three hearing the yells of laughter sent forth by the convulsed juniors. They were still travelling at top speed, and were already out of hearing.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake rolled over on the greensward. He was almost in convulsions, cackling and gasping, and gasping and cackling.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My word!" gasped Digby. He wiped his eyes, and wiped smears of damp paint all around them. "My word, it was too funny!"

"Funny!" shrieked Blake. "Funny ain't the word! There's not a word in the dictionary equal to it! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries wriggled out of the bush. He rolled over on the grass and kicked up his heels in ecstatic enjoyment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, I weally wegard that as funnay!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake sat up. He was absolutely breathless, and yet he could not help laughing. The sight of the Terrible Three running for their lives, with imaginary Indians after them, had been too excruciatingly funny.

"My only hat!" murmured Blake. "I never thought these Shell bouncers were so great in the sprinting line before!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think this is where we smile, kids! Ha, ha, ha!"

Their laughter rang in the woods again. The Terrible Three

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There was a sudden yell in the dusk. "At 'em!" Four savage-looking figures leaped into view and rushed upon the footpads with brandished tomahawks. For a moment the three ruffians seemed paralysed, then with gasps of deadly fear they went racing and stumbling down the road!

not there, there's the priory in Rylcombe Wood. But we'll look into the hut here first, to make sure."

"May as well," agreed Manners.

The hidden juniors had heard every word uttered by the Terrible Three, and they exchanged glances as Tom Merry moved on towards the hut. If the hero of the Shell once looked into it, he could not fail to see the clothes of the Fourth-Formers, and then he would be fairly on the track.

"Get ready!" murmured Blake. "Yell when I do, and charge!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Mind, nothing but yells! If you say anything they'd know our voices! Just yell like mad, and charge them with your tomahawks!"

Three were far away. Blake staggered to his feet, holding on to the tree trunk for support.

"Oh, my only Aunt Susan!" he said. "That I should live to see this day! I rather think the Red Indians' wheeze is a success, you fellows!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll make the whole School House shriek with this story!" grinned Blake. "Tom Merry & Co. will have to sing small, and no mistake!"

"Bai Jove, I should wathah say so!"

"They won't forget bolting for their lives from the Redskins in a hurry!" chuckled Blake. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm jolly glad they found their way to the hut. I only wish Figgins & Co. would come along. I should like to have the same thing up against the New House."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's go on the giddy warpath," said Digby. "We may meet Figgins & Co. in the wood. I know they were going out after cricket. I say, your paint wants touching up, Blake!"

"So does yours."

"Hand over that looking-glass of yours, Gussy!"

"I'm sorry, Dig, but I left it on the tree near the ruined hut. We shall have to go back for it."

"Stuff!" said Blake. "We're a quarter of a mile from there now. We shan't go back till we go there to change our clothes. We can touch up one another's chivvies."

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "Let's go on the warpath. If we keep on like this we shall make our ribs ache!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The warpaint was soon renovated equal to new, then the Fourth Form warriors set out on the warpath.

CHAPTER 9.

Figgins & Co. on the Track!

"I'M getting fatterfully hungry, Figgins!"

Fatty Wynn spoke pathetically, but the pathos in his voice did not seem to move the heartless Figgins; he only grunted.

"You can go back if you like, Fatty."

"Of course, I stick to you, Figgys. But we've been four or five hours in the wood already—"

"Nearly an hour and a half," said the exact Kerr, looking at his watch.

"Well, then, an hour and a half. And I was peckish when we started, and Blake made my mouth water by pretending he was going to ask us to a picnic!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins. "Blake took us in by making us tackle the Terrible Three. He's up to some dodge, and we ought to get on to it."

"Yes, rather!" said Kerr.

"We've been hunting for him for an hour and a half, and we're bound to find him if we keep on," said Figgins.

"Yes, but we haven't seen anything of him yet; and suppose it turns out when we find him that he hasn't any grub with him? We shall be in a nice fix!"

"You'll make me hungry if you keep on talking about grub!" grunted Figgins. "We're going to find those rotters if it takes us till calling-over. We're going to know what the little game is."

"Then we ought to have brought some sandwiches."

"Well, why didn't you?"

"I wanted to go back for some, but you wouldn't wait," said Fatty Wynn. "I can't say I consider that you've acted like a chum in this matter, Figgins."

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins.

Kerr held up his hand suddenly.

"I say, I heard something then!"

"I only had two veal and ham pies, and a—"

"Shut up, Fatty! Listen!"

The Co. listened intently. Once before they thought they had heard a sound of distant shouting in the wood, but had not been sure. Rylcombe Wood was extensive, covering some square miles of ground. But now the sound was nearer, and it was certain that Kerr had not been mistaken. There was a distant sound of a footstep crunching on fallen twigs.

"Quiet!" whispered Figgins.

There was someone close at hand in the wood, and he was coming their way. Of course, it might have been anybody—a boy from St. Jim's, or a lad from the village. Figgins hoped it was the quarry they were seeking.

"There he is," murmured Kerr.

A head and shoulders came into view through the bushes. Figgins gave a start, and then a sigh of disappointment. It was Skimpole of the Shell.

"Skimpole—hang!" said Figgins.

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Skimpole looked up at the sound of his voice. The brainy man of the Shell was walking along with a book in his hands, reading as he walked, with his spectacles perched on his nose.

"Is that you, Figgins?" he said, blinking at the chief of the New House juniors. "Are you having a ramble in the woods, and utilising this beautiful and balmy summer afternoon for the purpose of meditation and reflection?"

Figgins grunted.

"No, I'm not, ass! And the afternoon is not the only thing that's balmy here, either. Have you seen anything of Blake and his lot?"

"Yes, certainly!"

"Where?" exclaimed Figgins eagerly. "Where did you see them last, Skimpole, old fellow?"

"It was in Study No. 6."

Figgins glared.

"I mean, have you seen them in the wood?"

"No, I did not know they were here. Have they left the school surreptitiously?" asked Skimpole, looking interested, his detective instincts roused at once.

"They've gone off somewhere, and we're trying to find them," said Figgins. "Why can't you keep your eyes open, ass, and see things? You might be able to give us a clue, then."

"Perhaps I can now," said Skimpole. "I am inclined to think that I knew the reason of their going off in this secret manner. It is an indication of guilt."

"Of—of what?"

"Tom Merry has asked me to give him my services in elucidating the mystery of the hamper. I have already deduced that the hamper contained some guilty secret, evidence of which was sent to Blake by his uncle to be destroyed. Blake as good as admitted that there was a dead body in the hamper, though he tried to turn it into a joke afterwards."

"A—a—a what?" murmured Figgins dazedly.

"A dead body. You know it is a common custom for people who live on ranches in the Wild West to shoot one another with revolvers, as you can see by looking into any of the volumes of the adventures of Deadwood Bill, the Broncho Buster. Suppose Blake's uncle had some dead bodies to dispose of—"

"Skimpole, old chap, I seriously advise you to stick to Determinism, and let the amateur detective business alone," said Figgins solemnly. "And if you must be an amateur detective, don't take Deadwood Bill, the Broncho Buster, for your guide."

"A mind like mine naturally expects the carping of smaller minds. I—"

"The what?"

"The carping of smaller minds. You see," explained Skimpole, "if you read Carlyle, you would be aware of the undoubted fact that when a great genius appears, people misunderstand and deride him. That is the case with me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A great genius is impervious to the ridicule of the small and envious," said Skimpole. "Besides, as a Determinist, I cannot blame you. Your rude manners are evidently the result of bad training. The sordid surroundings of your early youth—"

Skimpole was fairly on his hobby-horse now, and nothing short of an earthquake or personal violence would have stopped him.

"Every human creature is the outcome of the combined influence of heredity and environment," he said, tapping his book with his knuckles to emphasise his points. "His heredity is modified by his environment, and his environment is modified by his heredity. If his hereditament is—I mean his heredity is—"

"Cheese it!"

"If the hereditament is more powerful than his enviro— I mean, if his enviro is more hereditament than his—"

"Cheese it, I say!"

"If his heredity is—"

"Oh, come on, chaps!" exclaimed Figgins. "He'll go on like this for hours!"

And Figgins & Co. ran into the wood, leaving Skimpole to waste his valuable thoughts upon the desert air.

The Determinist of St. Jim's shook his head solemnly.

"It is hard—very hard, indeed—to be continually thrown into contact with such dull and ignorant minds," he murmured. "But as a true Determinist I must go on labouring to improve those who are around me. Fortunately I have solace in this extremely interesting and instructive volume." Skimpole opened his book again. "How delightfully the author smashes up his opponents and proves the great truths of Determinism, and makes it perfectly clear to the dullest intellect that there is no effect without a cause, and that

every cause may truly be said to be the reason of the ensuing effects—that effect being undeniably the result of the cause in question. I do not see how anybody can possibly fail to be convinced by this luminous reasoning."

And Skimpole, deep in the luminous reasoning of his ponderous volume, walked on slowly through the wood, stumbling every now and then over roots or twigs, but hardly ever looking up from his entrancing book till, all of a sudden, he was startled from his intense perusal by a fiendish yell ringing in his ears. He gave a jump, and the book dropped from his hands into the grass.

"Dear me!" gasped Skimpole.

For a moment he could scarcely believe his eyes. Four ferocious-looking Red Indians had suddenly burst from the thickets, and were charging down upon him with brandished tomahawks and fiendish yells.

Skimpole blinked at them for a moment, and then ran for his life.

The freak of the Shell had never been famed for his powers as an athlete, but on this occasion he put up a burst of speed that would not have disgraced a young champion of the cinder path. In a twinkling he disappeared in the depths of the wood, the Red Indians not taking the trouble to pursue him.

They acted, indeed, in a way that would have excited the surprise of any genuine Redskins who might have been observing them.

The four braves, instead of pursuing the paleface and scalping him, sat down in the grass and roared with uncontrollable laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Determinist of St. Jim's vanished. The Blackfoot warriors chuckled and laughed, and laughed and chuckled.

"My only hat!" said the Indian chief. "The works as well as ever. First Tom Merry, and now Skimpole! Oh dear, I wish we could meet Figgins & Co.!"

"The young ass has left his book here," remarked Digby.

"Shove it in your pocket, then. We don't want him to lose it," grinned Blake, the Blackfoot chief.

"Haven't got any pockets."

"Stick it in your pouch, then, or down the back of your neck. We can't let the ass lose his book."

Digby pouched the precious volume on Determinism. The chums laughed till the woods rang with the merry shouts.

"Bai Jove," said Arthur Augustus, grinning through the war-paint daubed on his aristocratic features, "this is weally wippin', you know! I weally considah that this will be a triumph for us. We shall take the beastlay cake, you know. And when the wheeze gets out, all the fellows at St. Jim's will be dwessin' up as Wed Indians."

"I fancy so," chuckled Blake. "But we've got first pull. But come on, kids, and let's see if we can track down Figgins & Co. I am anxious to see Figgins."

"We mustn't keep this up too long," said D'Arcy. "My Cousin Ethel is coming to the school this afternoon, you know, and I want to get into pwopah attiah before she sees me, and I shall want a lot of cleanin' aftah this."

"You'll want a berth in a hospital if you disobey the orders of your great Red chief!" said Blake darkly. "Follow me on the warpath, my Red brothers!"

"But, weally—"

"Oh, cheese it! Follow your uncle!"

And the Blackfoot braves went scouring through the wood once more in search of fresh victims—and they were near at hand, as it happened.

CHAPTER 10.

Captured by Redskins!

FIGGINS paused in the dusky depths of the wood to listen. The Co. looked at him inquiringly.

"I heard something then," said Figgins, in answer to their mute questions. "It sounded to me like somebody laughing a long way off."

"I heard something," said Kerr. "Blessed if I could make it out, though. Might have been the wind in the trees."

"I say—" began Fatty Wynn.

"Well, what did you think it was, Fatty?"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that! I was wondering if either of you fellows had any toffee in—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Figgins.

"I can't eat coke, Figgins, and if you happen to have any toffee or bullseyes, it would stay my appetite, and perhaps save me from being ill!"

"Here's some aniseed balls," said Kerr. "They've been in my pocket a long time, and got mixed up with some birdseed and cobbler's-wax, but you're welcome to them!"

"You can keep them, thanks!"

"Well, I thought it was a case of saving you from dying of hunger. What are you listening for now, Figgins?"

"I think there's somebody yonder," said Figgins. "Blake & Co. are in the wood somewhere, and it may be them. Come on!"

"May as well!" assented Kerr.

The New House chums plunged into the thickets. They came out into a glade, where the grass showed signs of recent feet.

Kerr stopped.

"I think we could get a clue here!" he exclaimed, looking at the grass attentively. "There have been some fellows here lately, Figgy."

"Wish we knew the size of the boots they take!"

"I say, this is curious!" said Kerr, bending down and examining the tracks. "You see, the soil is soft and damp here, and it's taken the impression clearly. There is a single pair of boots—and then look at these other marks!"

"They're not boots!"

"No; but they've been made by feet! Look, here's the heel mark! These prints were made by somebody who hadn't any boots on, and yet the feet weren't bare, or there would be traces of the toes."

The New House chums looked at one another.

"What on earth are you getting at?" said Figgins. "I suppose there can't be any fellow going around with his feet wrapped up in cloth?"

"Well, no, I should say not; but you see the signs for yourself!"

"Chap in soft slippers, I should say," observed Fatty Wynn.

"Yes," said Kerr witheringly. "Chaps come out into the middle of a wood in soft slippers, don't they?"

"Well, they're not boots, and the feet aren't bare, and so—"

"If it were possible—" began Kerr slowly.

Figgins stared at him.

"If what were possible?"

"Well, it would be queer, but—"

"But what? What the dickens are you driving at, Kerr, old man?"

"Well, if it were possible, I should say those tracks were

(Continued on page 19.)

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HALLO, chums! I hope you have been collecting your coupons and putting them aside each week, as our grand Free Gift scheme comes to a close next week. In your next copy of the GEM you will find a final coupon worth fifty points and full particulars of where to send in your collection. If you have any doubt about the value of the points you have gathered in this amazing gift plan, and want to swell your total to a fine big figure, why don't you get a copy of this week's "Nelson Lee"? In this fine companion paper you will find three hundred points given away in one "go," and if you care for detective thrillers the extra-long story of Nelson Lee, the detective, and Nipper, his assistant, will provide you with first-class entertainment. Have a look at a copy, anyway. Now for next week's GEM. The long story of St. Jim's is a winner. The title,

"COUSIN ETHEL'S CHAMPION!"

tells you at once that one of your old favourites is back again in the pages of the GEM. You all like Cousin Ethel, I know, for she represents the ideal girl. Figgins and Skimpole are "dead nuts" on Cousin Ethel, and from this fact Martin Clifford has built up a wonderful story of fun and adventure which you simply must not miss. Order your GEM in good time. "Chums of the Fighting Fleet!" is a grand story and every chapter gets more interesting than the last, whilst Potts the Office Boy and his antics in a business office would make a cat laugh. Yes, next Wednesday's GEM is a gem, indeed. Don't miss it!

ANOTHER WORLD'S RECORD!

He was quite an innocent-looking sheep covered with a thick layer of fleecy wool, and he wondered what all the fuss was about. He was seized and sheered in double quick time and pushed out of the way. After that doubtless his interest centred on how long it would take him to grow a fresh coat. But the wool that came off him was the starting point, as it were, of a world's record. That wool eventually became the cloth which was scissored swiftly by an expert cutter, and inside twenty-four minutes forty-five seconds became a perfectly good suit for the sturdy frame of Brigadier-General Bessel-Browne. Yes, all the buttons were there, sewn on strongly. Seems hardly credible, does it, that a real suit could be made in that time? Thus a new world's record has been created by a group of Australians who had cast covetous eyes at the record set up by a British firm not long ago. It was a touch and go affair, for Britain's record for the same job was roughly five minutes over the time our Australian cousins took.

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SUPER CATS!

"MEOW! MEOW!" This familiar cat-call is put into capital letters with reason, for it's the call-sign of a race of super cats. The breeder of these giant felines has set his heart on ridding the world of rats. On his twenty-ton yacht, Mr. Bremmer—a Scotsman, by the way—trains his super cats in an up-to-date "school." So ready are his charges to learn the gentle art of rat killing, and so quick to pick up the finer points of the job, that they can now distinguish at first sight between a male and female rat. The big idea behind this is a theory that if the female rats are exterminated, breeding of these pernicious rodents will automatically cease and in time the menace of the rat will be just a matter of history. Sounds far-fetched, you may say, but results prove that the race of super cats can single out the females and dispatch them promptly. The male rat is allowed to go free!

OCEAN TREASURE!

The Italian salvage ship Artiglio is again in the news. You will remember, perhaps, that expert divers and salvage men had set their minds on recovering the vast treasure in gold bars and bullion which went to the bed of the ocean in 1922, when the liner Egypt was sunk off Ushant. For months the salvage men have operated over the barnacle-encrusted wreck, using explosives to clear away the jumble of wreckage from the "roof" of the liner's strong room. Now, their leading diver reports that he has seen the massive boxes which contain the treasure! What an experience, to see such treasure almost within one's grasp and then have to leave the sea bed and "come up for air." The Italian crew of the salvage ship are sticklers, however. One of these fine days, perhaps before this par appears in print—you never know—they will triumph. If so, the recovery of the Egypt's gold will rank as one of the finest pieces of salvage work that has ever "happened."

SUPER SPEED!

When Lieutenant G. H. Stainforth whizzed through the skies in his silver plane last October at the rate of four hundred and seven and a half miles an hour we gasped. The Schneider Trophy once again belonged to Britain. Those who know all about this important question of speed reckoned that Stainforth's amazing record was "safe" for a long time to come. But an Italian airman with a craze for speed has been "practising" over Lake Garda and his unofficial speed over a given

circuit was as high as four hundred and sixty-six miles an hour! Gee-whiz! If the world perseveres with this speed craze you will perhaps in the near future get your copy of the GEM within five minutes of its leaving the printing presses. That's all to the good, I can hear you saying.

HEARD THIS ONE?

First Tramp: "What you looking so unhappy about, Bert?"

Second Tramp: "Work! From morning to night it's work, work, work."

First Tramp: "How long you been at it?"

Second Tramp: "I don't start until to-morrow!"

A REPLY TO L. L.

L. L. writes to know how much a driving licence costs in the United States of America, and whether a fresh one has to be taken out in every different State. Here's the answer. The cost of a driving licence for an owner-driver is one dollar, for a chauffeur five dollars. The duration of the licence is for one year and it covers every State in the U.S.A. I hope the above will settle your "little argument," L. L.

A MARVEL OF SCIENCE!

Television is well on the way to being one of the many home comforts of the twentieth century. By the time you young GEM readers reach the "thirties," television, doubtless, will be nothing more marvellous to you than the common or garden telephone. Brainy folk have been working overtime on television experiments, and their latest and greatest achievement took place on June 1st. That, as most of you will recall, was Derby Day. On the famous Epsom Downs the race for the Blue Ribbon of the Turf took place before thousands of people, eighty per cent of whom were mighty lucky if they caught as much as a glimpse of a jockey's head as he flashed past on his speedy mount. Yet in a London cinema, sixteen miles from the racecourse, two thousand people saw the race for this year's Derby trophy in comfort. They heard the yells of the mighty throng, the raucous notes of the bookmakers, the thudding hoofbeats of the galloping horses—but better still they actually saw everything that was taking place. On the silver screen the images of people and horses on the Epsom Downs appeared. From the start to the finish of the race, synchronised to the second, every stage of the famous race was seen by the lucky two thousand sitting in comfortable seats. No wonder the television fans are enthusiastic over the experiment.

THE TORTOISE SIGN!

People in Great Britain are often heard complaining about the slowness of the Post Office, but taking the service as a whole it wants some beating. Out in Russia, some of the servants of the post office are so slow that the head of affairs has hit on a novel method of speeding them up. Outside the very slow post office can be seen a giant tortoise jammed to the wall, just as if it were climbing up it. This symbol of slowness has the effect of making the staff smarten up in order to get rid of this "outward and visible sign" of slackness. But we hope these methods won't come to Britain!

YOUR EDITOR.

REDSKINS OF ST. JIM'S!

(Continued from page 17.)

made by chaps wearing something in the style of Indian moccasins," said Kerr, scratching his head thoughtfully.

Figgins grinned.
"Yes, I believe Red Indians are pretty plentiful in an English wood, as a rule!" he said, with heavy sarcasm.

"I don't know!"
"You don't know what? Do you mean to say you think there might be a stray Indian about here—strayed from the Rocky Mountains by mistake, and stepped across the Atlantic Ocean absent-mindedly?" asked Figgins, still in the same strain.

"No," said the Scottish partner in the Co. quietly; "but there might be fellows here playing Indians for a lark."

Figgins started.
"What do you mean?"
"I mean that that might be the wheeze Blake and his lot are keeping so jolly dark," said Kerr.

"My only hat!"
"You see, I— Holy smoke! What's that?"
"That" was a terrific yell ringing with savage suddenness through the wood, and echoing wildly among the trees and thickets.

The New House trio jumped up in alarm and amazement.

Four painted savages rushed upon them from the bushes—four savage-looking Redskins, with brandished tomahawks and ringing yells, and faces aglare with hideous war-paint!

For a second Figgins & Co. were stricken with dismay.
And there is no doubt that, had the Redskins come upon them wholly by surprise, they would have taken to their heels instantly.

But Kerr's suspicion had come as a warning to the New House chums, and after the first moment's shock, they suspected the truth.

"Line up!" yelled Figgins, confronting the charging savages boldly.

"Right-ho!" gasped Wynn and Kerr.
On rushed the Redskins.

They expected Figgins & Co. to run, but Figgins & Co. did not run, and the result was that the two parties met with a fearful collision.

Tomahawks went flying right and left, and the juniors rolled on the ground.

Figgins & Co. were hurled down by the shock, and the odds being against them, they had no chance of getting up again.

Four to three was long odds, when individually the juniors were pretty well matched, and Figgins, Wynn, and Kerr gasped in the grass, with the Redskins pinning them down and grinning in triumph over them.

"You—you rotters!" gasped Figgins. "I know who you are! You are Blake, you beast! Get off my chest!"

The Blackfoot chief gave him a ferocious glare.
"Ka-ka-ke-ki-ko-kkkoo!" he said, grinding his teeth.

Figgins shivered for a moment.
Blake could not be supposed to be able to talk Redskin language, but that grinding sentence really did sound genuine.

Was it possible—
But the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was heard the next moment, as if on purpose to dispel Figgins' doubts.

"Pway keep still, you paleface wottah, or I shall have no alternative but to scalp you with this beastlay scalp-knife."

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped Kerr.
"I wefuse to be laughed at, paleface boundah! Ugh! I will lift the scalp of the beastlay whiteskin!"

"Oh, you cuckoo!" said Blake. "You were bound to give the show away, of course!"

"I wefuse to admit that I have given the show away, Blake! I was keeping up the chawactah in pwopah style, and now you have given the whole thing away!"

"Ass!"
"I wefuse to be called an ass!"
"Lemme gerrup!" growled Figgins.

"Bosh!" said Blake. "You are the prisoner of the great chief of the Blackfeet. What is to be the fate of the dastardly palefaces, my brothers?"

"Oh, cheese that bosh!"
"Better burn them at the stake, deah boys!"

"Scalp them, I should say!" Herries remarked.
"Bind them to trees and shoot arrows at them!" suggested Digby. "If we happened to kill them, we can bury

them quietly in the wood without anybody being the wiser! They'd never be missed."

"Yaas, wathah! That's a good ideah!"
"Oh, don't rot!" said Figgins. "Get off my chest!"

"The paleface dogs have been taken prisoners by the braves of the Blackfeet!" said Blake. "They are doomed to—"

"Yaas, wathah! Whenever any paleface dogs are taken pwiseonahs by the bwaves of the Blackfeet, they must considah themselves doomed—"

"Shut up!"
"I wefuse to shut up!"

"I'm chief of this tribe!"
"You may be chief of the twibe, deah boy; but affiah givin' the game away as you have done, you cannot expect us to respect you as a leadah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Figgins & Co.
"If you are looking for a rap on the head with a tomahawk, Gussy—"

"I am not lookin' for a wap on the head with a tomahawk, Blake, and I wegard the suggestion as widiculous!"

"Well, you're going the right way to get it! First of all you give the show away, and then you—"

"Wats! I wefuse to admit for a moment that I have given the beastlay show away, and I appeal to the othahs!"

"Oh, cheese it! Brothers, what is to be the fate of the paleface dogs? I suggest tying them up and leaving them in the grass, to wriggle home as best they can. We could brain them with our tomahawks, but I doubt if they have any brains, and, besides, it would give us the trouble of cleaning the tomahawks afterwards!"

"There's something in that!"
"Yaas, wathah!"

"Tie them up, Dig, while we hold them!" said Blake.
"Bind fast the paleface dogs hand and foot, and then—"

"If you tie me up, I'll wring your silly neck, Blake!"
"It doesn't matter if you hurt them," said Blake, unheeding.

"That's a point of no consequence! Just make them safe, that's all!"

"Right you are!" grinned Digby.
A stout stick was cut from a tree and stuck in the ground.

Figgins & Co. were shackled to it in a very short time. Digby did not tie them very tight, leaving the cords so that the prisoners could wriggle themselves free in a quarter of an hour or so, when they were left alone. Then the Redskin braves rose, and left them to wriggle.

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"I'll make you sit up for this!" grunted Figgins.
"Silence, paleface dogs!"

"Silly ass!"
"The braves of the Blackfeet will now dance the war-dance round their captured foes," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"
"Let the dance be danced," said Blake solemnly. "If we tread on the paleface prisoners, that is their look out."

"Rather!"
The Blackfoot braves commenced the dance of triumph round their fallen foes. Figgins & Co. watched them apprehensively.

They sat on the grass, and the dancers came very near them as they circled round with savage gestures and brandished tomahawks.

"Here we go gathering nuts and may!" said Kerr sarcastically. "Here we— Ow!"

Whether by accident or not, Blake's foot came down on his leg, and Kerr yelled and squirmed.

"Keep off, you howling ass!"
The war-dance continued. It was something quite original in the way of dancing, and quite barbaric.

"Lot of jumping kangaroos!" grunted Figgins.
Then Figgins yelled, as a moccasined foot plumped into his ribs.

"Keep off, you villain!"
"Here we go round the mulberry-bush!" said Fatty Wynn.

And then Fatty Wynn received an accidental kick.
Figgins & Co. thought they had better keep their remarks to themselves after that, and the dance continued, and finished without further interruption on the part of the New House juniors.

"Let us depart, my Red brothers," said Blake, gasping, as he stopped at last. "The paleface dogs can be left for the coyotes of the prairie to gnaw their giddy-bones."

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"Yaas, wathah!"

The Red Indians disappeared into the wood, and Figgins & Co. were left to wriggle themselves free as best they could.

CHAPTER 11.

The Terrible Three Get Their Own Back!

TOM MERRY stopped and looked back. He had run on at top speed for a good mile, after the meeting with the savage warriors. Lowther and Manners had fallen a little behind now, and Tom Merry stopped for them. The chums of the Shell were fully persuaded of the reality of the danger they were in, but Tom Merry was not the fellow to leave his chums, whatever the peril might be.

"Go on!" gasped Lowther, coming up panting.

Manners was only a few moments behind. The chums ran on again together, but at a more moderate pace.

"They're not following us," said Tom Merry.

"I heard them," said Manners.

"Yes; but they've stopped."

"Better keep on till we get to the road, at least."

"Right-ho!"

The chums of the Shell ran on. They came out into the Rylcombe road at last, and there they threw themselves upon the grassy bank beside the road, breathless and exhausted, and looked at one another.

In the quiet country road it seemed as if the vision of the savage Redskins in the wood must have been a dream, an illusion of some kind; in spite of themselves, and the evidence of their own eyes, the chums doubted the reality of what they had seen.

"I say—" began Lowther slowly.

"Well?" said Tom Merry.

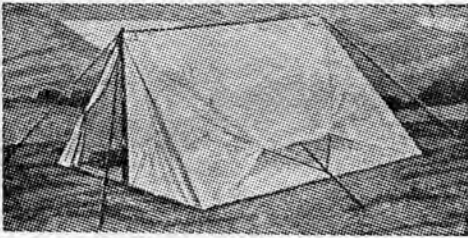
"I say, there's something queer about all this. There can't be any Red Indians in a wood in England."

"We saw them," said Manners.

"I know we did; but—"

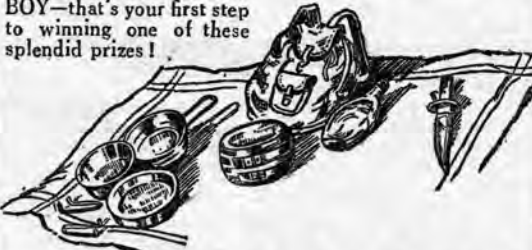
"They might be Redskins got away from some show, like Buffalo Bill's, and taken to a wild life again," said Tom Merry. "That's all I could think—though we didn't stop to think much, did we?"

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"I say, it can't be the real thing!" persisted Lowther, always the most sceptical of the three. "It's rot to think that they meant to hurt us with those tomahawks! Even if they were real Indians out of a show, or anything of that sort, they wouldn't want to hurt a lot of schoolboys."

"I suppose not," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "But it seemed jolly real at the time, all the same."

"I admit that, but—"

"But you think we have been taken in?"

"Yes, I do. They weren't real Indians at all, I imagine, but a lot of chaps dressed up as Indians, trying to frighten us."

"And they succeeded."

"I know they did. We were taken by surprise. When you suddenly see a fellow bolting at you, brandishing an axe, you don't stop to see whether it's a hoax, I suppose," said Lowther. "It's safer to bolt first and think afterwards."

"Yes, rather!"

"But, all the same, I believe this is a hoax."

Tom Merry looked very thoughtful.

"Did you notice how many of them there were?" he asked.

"Four, I think."

"I thought I saw four, too," said Manners.

"So did I," said Tom Merry, and his face relaxed into a grin. "And you remember we came into the wood to look for four fellows—though we didn't expect to find them in the guise of Red Indians."

Manners and Lowther gave a simultaneous jump.

"Blake & Co.!" yelled Lowther.

"Study No. 6!" gasped Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes; and we were asses not to think of it before; but, as Lowther says, it's not easy to think quietly over things when a fellow is bolting at you with an axe. We couldn't guess what was the wheeze Blake & Co. had on; but I think we've guessed it now. They're playing Indians."

"My hat!"

"It's all simple now, when we've got the clue," said Tom Merry, grinning. "Of course, that was what Blake's uncle sent him from his ranch in America—the Redskin rig-out. That's what they've been keeping so dark."

"Of course! We ought to have guessed!"

"Well, I don't see exactly how we could have guessed," said Tom Merry. "Anyway, we didn't! That's what they sneaked off into the wood for this afternoon, and it's no good denying that they've got the laugh of us."

"Yes, and they'll all be cackling away like a lot of geese. And so will the School House be, when they tell the story at home!" growled Lowther.

"Perhaps they'll have something else to tell as well," said Tom Merry quietly. "I've got an idea which will enable us to get our own back, if it works out all right."

"What is it?" asked Lowther and Manners together eagerly.

"Well, I suppose there isn't much doubt now that the Redskins were really Blake & Co."

"None at all."

"Then it's pretty clear that they went to the old hut in the wood to change into the Redskin rig. That's where we found them, and you remember they jumped on us just as we were going to look into the hut."

"Yes."

"They have left their own clothes somewhere," grinned Tom Merry. "I imagine that if we got to the old hut we should find them there—what?"

"Ripping!" exclaimed Lowther, jumping up. "If we could collar their togs—"

"They'd have to go back to St. Jim's as Red Indians!" cackled Manners. "My hat! That would be getting our own back, and no mistake!"

"Ha ha, ha!"

"It depends upon whether we can get hold of the clothes," said Tom Merry, rising as he spoke. "I think we can go into the woods safely enough now, as we have found out what kind of Indians they are!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes."

"Then let's get along to the old hut, and see what we shall see."

"Come on!"

Full of their new idea, the Terrible Three plunged into the wood. The idea of making Blake & Co. walk along the public high road back to the school in the Red Indian rig-out made them chuckle whenever they thought of it. They lost no time in getting through the wood, taking care to make as little noise as possible, in case the chums of Study No. 6 should be at hand, and at length they came in sight of the ruined hut again.

Tom Merry made the sign to halt, and he advanced cautiously, peering through the bushes. There was no one



"Hold on! I can't run any more! Hold on!" Blake was laughing too much to run. He threw himself down on the greensward, Digby reeled against a tree, Herries staggered into a bush, and Arthur Augustus sat down, doubled up with uncontrollable mirth. And Tom Merry & Co., in the distance, were bolting for their lives!

in sight; the spot seemed to be wholly deserted. The glimmer of a small looking-glass on a tree caught Tom Merry's eyes. It was D'Arcy's pocket mirror. But its owner was not there.

"I think the coast's clear, kids."

"Looks like it. Come on!"

The Terrible Three ran towards the hut. There were no Redskins in the bushes this time. The spot was deserted. Tom Merry looked into the hut and uttered an exclamation:

"Look!"

There were the clothes of Blake & Co., and the sun, glimmering through the gaps in the hut, shone upon the bright polish of D'Arcy's silk hat.

Tom Merry laughed heartily.

"No doubt on the subject now, kids."

"Rather not!" said Lowther. "That's Gussy's topper, and, besides, it is his pocket mirror sticking on the tree. They used it to paint by, of course."

"Of course. And here are the clothes of the bold warriors. Better not lose any time; we don't know when they will come back to change."

Manners picked up D'Arcy's topper, and then slung the School House swell's clothes over his arm. Lowther took up three jackets and waistcoats, and Tom Merry three pairs of trousers and some other articles of attire.

"Can't carry the boots," said Tom Merry. "Besides, it would be a bit rough making them tramp all the way to St. Jim's in skin moccasins. They can have their boots."

"They can have this topper, too!" said Manners. "It's too much trouble to carry it. We'll take the other things along."

"Right-ho! Let's clear!"

The Terrible Three hurried out of the hut with the cap-

tured clothes. The Redskins were still not in sight, but the chums of the Shell lost no time. They plunged into the wood, and not till they were at a good distance from the ruined hut did they pause to give vent to their merriment.

CHAPTER 12.

A Shock for Blake & Co.

"WELL, I think we have really had a ripping afternoon!" Jack Blake remarked, as four dusty and tired Blackfoot warriors came towards the old hut in the gathering dusk of the glorious summer evening.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I should say so," Herries remarked. "The Shell bounders will have the laugh up against them this evening, and so will Figgins & Co."

"To say nothing of that ass Skimpole!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, bai Jove! We have weally twiumped to-day, deah boys! The secwet is out now, owin' to Blake givin' it away to Figgins, but it was bound to come out. If the Wedskin wheeze is taken up, we started it!"

"Here we are!" said Blake, as he came to the hut. "Now for a quick change and a sprint back to St. Jim's. We shan't be able to get all the paint off our faces."

"Bai Jove, I never thought of that!"

"I didn't either," confessed Blake. "Next time we'll bring a sponge and some water and a towel. But we can give our faces a rub with our handkerchiefs, then they won't be noticed much. We shall have time to run in and wash before turning up in the Hall for calling-over."

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"That's so. Let's get changed."
 Blake stepped into the hut. He looked about him with a puzzled expression.
 "I say, did you move the clothes?" he asked.
 "Certainly not, deah boy."
 "Did you, Herries?"
 "No."
 "You, Dig?"
 "Of course not! What's the matter?"
 "I can't see them!"
 "Oh, weally, Blake!"
 "I can't see them. I laid mine here."
 "And I laid mine here."
 "Here's the boots."
 "And Gussy's topper."
 "Where are my togs?"
 "And mine?"
 "And mine?"
 "My only hat! They're gone!"
 The chums of Study No. 6 stared at one another in utter dismay.

The boots were there, and D'Arcy's silk hat, but the clothes were gone. Four suits of clothes had vanished as utterly as though they had sunk into the earth.

"Bai Jove!"
 "Some beastly tramp has been this way and collared them!" muttered Digby.
 Blake shook his head.
 "Why should a tramp come to such an out-of-the-way place as this? He couldn't expect to find anything here."
 "Then, how—"

"Besides, the boots are left here, and a tramp would have made a clean sweep if he stole anything at all."

"I don't know, you know. It would be no joke twyin' to cawwy Hewwies' boots!"

"Oh, ring off!" grunted Herries. "You let my boots alone!"

Herries did not take a small size in boots, and he was sensitive on that point.

"Certainly, deah boy. I was only wemarkin'—"

"Well, don't!"
 "It wasn't a tramp," said Blake. "It was some fellow japing us, and, as a matter of fact, I think I can guess whom it was."

"Tom Merry?"

"Yes. I suppose it dawned upon them whom the Redskins were, when they had time to think, and they came back and collared our togs," said Blake ruefully. "We ought to have thought of it."

"You mean, you ought to have thought of it," suggested Digby. "You're chief of this tribe, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! As chief of this tribe, Blake ought to have thought—"

"Oh, it's no good saying I told you so!" said Blake tartly. "Don't begin to cackle like a lot of girls."

"Blake, I wefuse—"

"Oh, cheese it!"
 "I decline to cheese it! I wefuse to allow your dispawagin' wemark concernin' girls to pass uncawwected. I have a gweat admivawion for girls, and I wefuse to wegard as a friend any fellow who speaks of them dispawawgingly."

"You ass!"

"Pway do not address me as an ass, or I may be compelled to pwocced to violence," said D'Arcy. "Before we go any farther I considah that Blake ought to withdwaw his extremely ungallant wemark."

"I haven't time to brain you now," said Blake. "I say, what on earth are we to do for clothes? We can't go to St. Jim's in this rig."

"My hat! No!"

"We can't stay here all night," said Herries. "This wouldn't have happened if we had brought my bulldog."

"But we haven't!" snapped Blake.

"No. I know we haven't, but if we had—"

"Oh rats! What's to be done, that's the question."

"Blessed if I know," said Digby. "We can't stop here, as Herries says. We can't whistle the clothes back. Tom Merry means to make us show up at the school in this rig, and I fancy we can't help it."

"It is impos for us to appeah in public in this widiculous wig, Digbay."

"What wig are you talking about? You're not wearing a wig, are you?"

"I am alludin' to this widiculous Wedskin wig-out."

"Oh, I see! Well, Gussy, you'll have to; there's nothing else for it."

"It's impos. My Cousin Ethel is coming to St. Jim's, and the Head is comin' back from Wayland by the same twain. We shall wun into them—I feel quite sure of that—and it

will be Blake's fault that I am placed in a widiculous position."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" grunted Blake. "You are always more or less ridiculous, and so it won't be noticed. But what about me?"

"I wefuse to allow—"

"The duds may be hidden somewhere about here," Digby suggested.

Blake's painted face brightened up.
 "It's possible; let's look."

"Yaas, wathah!"

They hunted for the clothes; but they were not to be found. The garments had evidently been taken away. Blake ceased to search at last, with an exclamation of disgust.

"They're gone, kids."

"Yaas, there doesn't seem to be much doubt about that, deah boys."

"It's getting on, too," said Blake. "We haven't much time to get back to St. Jim's before calling-over."

"Bai Jove! We shall have to find time to change before showin' up in the Hall," said D'Arcy. "It would make wathah a sensation if four Wed Indians came in for calling-ovah, you know."

Blake laughed.

"Yes. I can imagine what Lathom would look like. It's no good hanging about here, chaps. We've got to get to the school."

"It's rotten!"

"I know it is, but it can't be helped. Come on."

"Let's get our boots on, anyway. We can carry the moccasins."

"Yaas, and I shall put on my silk hat," said D'Arcy, stripping off the Blackfoot head-dress of feathers. "It's as well to look as respectable as possible."

The sight of D'Arcy in Indian leggings and shirt, war-paint, and a silk hat, was too much for his comrades. In spite of the worry on their minds, they burst into a roar of laughter.

D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye.

"Weally, deah boys—"

"That's right, Gussy; you're complete now," said Blake. "Oh dear! I wish I had Manners' camera here. Are you fellows ready?"

"Yes, rather."

"Then let's get along."

And the Blackfeet, shod in boots now, and carrying their moccasins slung upon their tomahawks, went through the wood towards the Rylcombe road, to return to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 13.

Redskins to the Rescue!

THE dusk of the June evening was drawing in. Blake made good speed, anxious to get into the school in time to change before calling-over.

D'Arcy was silent and disconsolate. He realised that Tom Merry and his chums would be waiting at the school to greet the returning Indians, and that the Blackfoot warriors would be unmercifully geyed.

And Arthur Augustus did not like the prospect.

Cousin Ethel was coming down to St. Jim's, and the Head was coming from the station with her, which was the reason why the chums had not gone to meet the train. D'Arcy had a foreboding that Cousin Ethel would see him before he had time to change his attire.

"This is wathah wotten," he murmured. "Blake, I wegard you as havin' let me in for this widiculous contwempts."

"Rats!" growled Blake.

"If you say 'wats' to me, Blake, I shall—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"Don't bother!" said Digby. "I suppose Tom Merry and the rest will be waiting at the gate, and we shall be geyed to death."

"Certain," said Herries.

"It is weally too wotten!"

"Oh, we've had our fun, and now we've got to pay the piper," said Blake, as cheerfully as he could. "It can't be helped."

"If we had taken my bulldog—"

"Oh, blow your bulldog! I'm getting fed up with your bulldog, Herries!"

"All the same, if we had taken it—"

"Yaas, wathah! It was careless of you, Hewwies, not to take your beastlay bulldog! It was careless of Blake. I shall look widiculous, and—"

"That won't be anything new."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake. "There's a cart or something coming. We might get a lift, and, by Jove, if we



"Ha, ha, ha!" The sight of D'Arcy in Indian leggings and shirt, war-paint and a silk hat, was too much for his comrades. In spite of the worry on their minds they burst into a roar of laughter. D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye. "Weally, deah boys—"

could get somebody to drive us right into the place, we could jump out and nip into the House without—"

"It's a dogcart," said Digby, peering through the dusk at the approaching vehicle, which was coming from the direction of the village of Rylcombe.

"There's only two in it," said Herries.

Blake gave a start.

"Cover! Quick!"

"What—"

"It's Dr. Holmes' trap. It's the Head driving, and that's Miss Cleveland—Cousin Ethel—sitting beside him."

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

The Head of St. Jim's had a car and a chauffeur, but he was fond of driving himself about in a dog cart. It was this he had driven to the station to meet Miss Cleveland.

The juniors scuttled into the trees beside the lane. The dog-cart came rattling by. The concealed boys saw the occupants of the vehicle plainly as it passed. Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, was driving, and Cousin Ethel was beside him.

Quiet as mice, the juniors crouched among the trees. Not for worlds would they have been seen at that moment. But they were secure in cover.

The trap passed on towards St. Jim's.

Jack Blake drew a deep breath of relief. He and his chums came out from the trees and looked down the road after the disappearing trap.

"Bai Jove! That was a nawwow escape, deah boys!"

"It was, rather! There would have been a row if the Head had spotted us on a public road in this rig-out."

"I wasn't thinking of the Head, Blake; I was thinkin' of the widiculous impwession I should make upon Cousin Ethel."

"They— Hallo! What's that?"

Blake broke off suddenly. There was a sound of clattering hoofs, a snorting horse, and a savage voice in the dusky distance.

"Something gone wrong with the dog-cart."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on!" exclaimed Blake, breaking into a run. "It's an accident of some sort."

The juniors ran hard.

There was evidently something wrong with the Head's dog-cart. The vehicle could be seen turning, making it clear, that the dogcart had been backed against the high grassy bank which at this place bordered the road.

Forgetful in the excitement of the moment of their strange attire, the chums of Study No. 6 ran to the rescue.

Blake gritted his teeth as he came near enough to see what was wrong.

A man in rough garb was standing at the horse's head, gripping the bit, and forcing the restive animal to a standstill. Two others were close up to the cart, one on either side, and each of them had a bludgeon in his hand. There was no mistaking what was happening—it was a daring attempt at robbery. More than once of late there had been robberies with violence in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's, and this was evidently a more than usually daring attack by the same gang. The dogcart, in a lonely lane at dusk, with only an old gentleman and a young girl in it, was at the mercy of three powerful footpads.

Blake grasped the situation, and he paused for a moment to whisper to his comrades.

"It's a robbery! Look out!"

"Right-ho!"

"Keep on the grass! Don't let them hear us!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Follow me, and give them the backs of the tomahawks!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather!"

The juniors ran on silently on the belt of grass that

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bordered the lane. They could hear the savage voice ahead clearly through the summer evening.

"Hand over your money—quick! We've no time to waste!"

Then the Head's voice was heard, trembling with anger, not with fear:

"I will do nothing of the sort, you ruffians!"

One of the footpads brandished his bludgeon so close to Dr. Holmes' head that he involuntarily shrank back.

"Do you want me to brain yer?"

Ethel Cleveland clung to the Head's arm. The girl's face was white with terror, but she was not shrieking. There was nothing hysterical about Cousin Ethel.

"Dr. Holmes, give them what they ask!"

"I'll brain yer if yer dox't!"

The Head hesitated.

He was helpless against the footpads, and he had Ethel to think of. Unwillingly he slid his hand into his pocket.

"You shall suffer for this, you scoundrels!" he said in a low voice.

"Not so much jaw! Your money—quick!"

There was a sudden yell in the dusk.

"At 'em!"

The three footpads jumped in sudden alarm and looked quickly round. Four savage-looking figures leaped into view and rushed upon them with brandished tomahawks.

For a moment the three ruffians seemed paralysed with terror. The tomahawks were within a few inches of them when they realised their danger and sprang to escape it.

Not for an instant did they dream of showing fight.

With gasps of deadly fear the three footpads went racing and stumbling down the road, and plunged through a hedge and disappeared.

They were gone so swiftly that the juniors hardly realised

that the combat was over without a blow being struck, and D'Arcy was still brandishing his tomahawk, much to the peril of the heads of his comrades.

"Hold on!" said Blake. "They're gone!"

"I'm sowwy! I weally wanted to bwarn some of the wottahs!"

Dr. Holmes and Cousin Ethel were staring down from the trap at the strange figures before them in utter amazement.

"What—what—who are you?" said the Head at last. "I thank you very much for coming to my aid in this manner, but—who are you? Can you speak English?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

The Head gave a violent start.

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir, and vewy sowwy to appeah before you in this wickidulous attiah, I assuah you."

"D'Arcy!"

The Head stared at Arthur Augustus in utter bewilderment.

Cousin Ethel looked at him, too, and the colour slowly came back into her fair cheeks. Something like a smile stole over her face.

D'Arcy stood nat in hand, bowing. The spectacle of a Red Indian bowing over a silk hat was so ridiculous that the Head, in spite of himself, burst into a laugh.

"D'Arcy!" he said, for the third time. "I—I am amazed!" And, indeed, he looked it. "What does this mean? What can you mean by appearing on a public road in such an utterly ridiculous fashion?"

"If you please, sir—" began Blake.

"Is that you, Blake?"

"Yes, sir. We—"

"Pway allow me to explain, Blake. I shall be able to put it evah so much more cleahly to Dr. Holmes."

"Dry up, ass!" whispered Herries.

"I wufuse to dwy up, I—"

"If you please, sir," said Blake, "we've been playing at Indians in the wood with the things my uncle sent me from America, sir."

"Ah, yes, I remember!"

"And some rotter—I mean some bounder, that is to say, some chap came along and scoffed our clothes—"

"And what?"

"And took our clothes away, sir."

The Head smiled.

"I see; and so you are returning to the school in this absurd state!"

"Well, sir," said Blake diplomatically, "we thought you wouldn't like us to be late for calling-over."

"That's it, exactly," said D'Arcy. "We were not particulah about passin' a night or two in the beastlay wood, sir, but we thought you wouldn't like us to be late for calling-ovah, sir."

"Indeed, that was very thoughtful of you," said the Head, smiling. "You do not always consider my wishes on that subject so carefully."

Blake coloured under his paint.

"You see, sir—"

"Yes, I see, Blake. I think you all merit some punishment for appearing in public like this, whatever reason you have to offer, for I dare say the boys who played this trick on you were not quite unprovoked."

The juniors laughed involuntarily.

"We might have given them a scare, sir," confessed Blake.

Dr. Holmes laughed.

"Yes, I thought as much. In the circumstances, however, as the matter has turned out so fortunately for Miss Cleveland and myself, I shall overlook any fault you have been guilty of, and I can only thank you warmly for your splendid pluck in coming to my aid as you did."

"Oh, really, sir—"

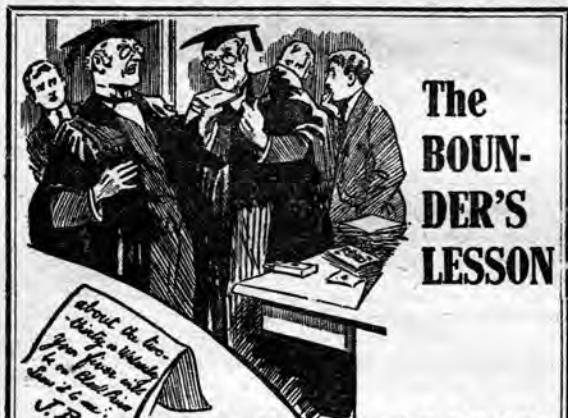
"It is fortunate that those wretches were frightened by your appearance, or you might have been hurt," said the Head. "I am sure you did not stop to think of that, though. It was very brave of you, and I am proud of you, my lads."

"Yes, indeed," said Cousin Ethel, very softly. "It was very, very brave."

"Weally, Ethel, you know, these chaps are wathah bwave when I am leadin' them," said Arthur Augustus. "I have—Hewwies, if you twead on my foot again I shall punch your head! This is the second time you have twodden on my beastlay foot!"

Dr. Holmes glanced up the dusky lane.

"It is possible that those wretches may recover from their fright and return," he said. "We must get to the school, and I will telephone to the police the news of this outrage. I think you lads will find room in the back of the dogcart."



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"Certainly, sir!"
 "Yaas, wathah! I say, Ethel, I suppose you think I look awfully widdleous?"
 "Yes, I do indeed, Arthur!"
 "Oh, weally, Ethel, you know—"
 "Jump in!" said Blake.
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "Are you going to jump in, or shall I chuck you in?"
 "Oh, if you are goin' to be wude about it I'll jump in, Blake."

The juniors piled into the dogcart behind. It was a bit of a squeeze, but there was just space for them. D'Arcy had no smart clothes to be rumpled or crushed, fortunately, so there was no trouble on that score.

The doctor gathered up his reins and drove on. The dogcart rattled away merrily towards St. Jim's.

Blake squeezed Digby's arm.
 "It's all right now, old son!"
 "What's all right?" said Dig.
 "This giddy homecoming! Instead of crawling in with all the chaps cackling round us, we are going home as giddy heroes, and it will be a regular triumph."
 "Bai Jove, yaas, wathah!"

CHAPTER 14. The Triumph!

TOM MERRY stood at the gates of St. Jim's, looking down the road. It was time for locking up, but Taggles had not yet closed the gates, as he knew the train the Head was meeting, and that the dogcart was coming back from Rylcombe. As soon as the Head was in, the gates would be locked, whether Blake & Co. had returned or not.

"Can't see them yet," said Tom Merry.
 Figgins & Co. were there, too. They had wriggled themselves out of the loose cords that had confined them, and had returned to St. Jim's in a somewhat chastened mood. But as soon as they met the Terrible Three, and learned of the jape that had been played upon Blake & Co., their spirits revived.

Now the chums of the Shell and Figgins & Co. were at the gates, waiting for the Red Indians to appear, and a crowd of other juniors had collected to see the fun.

"My hat!" said Figgins. "We'll guy them! We'll teach them to go around as Red Indians, by Jove!"

"It is really too bad of them!" said Skimpole. "Now that you speak of it, I am convinced that the dreadful savages who startled me in the wood were, in reality, Blake and his misguided companions, and through their absurd prank I have lost my valuable book on the subject of Determinism."

"Jolly good thing, too!" said Monty Lowther.
 "Really, Lowther, you speak in ignorance of the value of that remarkable book," said Skimpole. "If you knew the beautifully clear way in which the author proves that heredity and environment are the cause, and also the effect, of—"

"Rats!"
 "Certainly not! The subject has nothing to do with rodents of any description. Hereditament and enviroiny—I mean, hereny and eneditament—"

"Oh, cheese it, here comes somebody!"
 "It's the Head's dogcart," said Figgins. "Stand back, there!"

The dogcart drove up to the gates.
 The juniors stood cap in hand to the Head and Miss Ethel as the dogcart came in, and then there was a general gasp of stupefaction.

"The Redskins!"
 "Blake & Co.!"
 "My only hat!"

Four savage Blackfoot braves grinned at the juniors from the trap, and waved their hands as the Head drove on towards the School House.

"Ugh!" said the four braves, in chorals, and one of them raised a silk hat in polite acknowledgment of the stares of the juniors.

"My word! What does it mean?"
 "They're not in disgrace," murmured Figgins. "The Head hasn't run them in. They're in high feather."

"Can't understand it," said Tom Merry, running his fingers through his curly hair. "Can you, Monty?"
 "Blessed if I can!"

The crowd followed the trap. It stopped before the School House, and the Head alighted with the juniors, and D'Arcy, of course, was the one to assist Cousin Ethel down.

Dr. Holmes turned to the amazed crowd of juniors. There was a genial smile on his kind old face.

"My boys," he said, glancing over the curious throng, "your four schoolfellows here have acted in a very brave and gallant manner, by coming to my assistance when my cart was stopped in the lane by three ruffianly footpads.

For that reason I shall not inquire into this absurd prank which has come to my notice. Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy are four brave lads, of whom you should be proud."

And the Head and Cousin Ethel passed into the house.

In a moment the four Redskins were surrounded, and each of them became the recipient of hearty slaps of congratulation on the back and shoulders.

"Here, hold on!" roared Blake. "If you hit me again, Figgins, I'll wipe up the quad with you!"

"I was only showing my admiration—"

"Then 'o and admire someone else, if that's the way you show it."

"What have you been doing?" demanded Tom Merry.
 "We were waiting at the gate to guy you, as you deserve, and now you come in in high feather!"

"Mean, I call it!" said Manners.
 Jack Blake laughed.

"Oh, we've fallen on our feet!" he exclaimed. "No thanks to you bouncers, though. I suppose it was you who had our logs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never mind, we won't lick you, as it's turned out so well."

"That's all the better for you—"

"Oh, don't waste time talking to these kids!" said Blake loftily. "We're giddy heroes, that's what's the matter with us, and they ought to be proud of us. The Head says so, and he ought to know."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's go in and get cleaned before calling-over."

The juniors went into the House.

"Well," said Tom Merry, "you're a cheeky set of kids, but you've played up jolly well on this occasion, so—"

"Cheers for Blake & Co.!" said Figgins.

"Bravo!"

And the cheers were given with a will. Blake & Co. walked in with their ears tingling. They had come out ahead, after all, and they were very well pleased. The cheers followed them in, and there was no doubt that that day had been signalled by a triumph for Blake & Co.

THE END.

(Have a look below at the cover of next week's ripping yarn of Tom Merry & Co., **COUSIN ETHEL'S CHAMPION!** This yarn is the real goods!)

Cousin Ethel's Champion!

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S GREAT YARN.

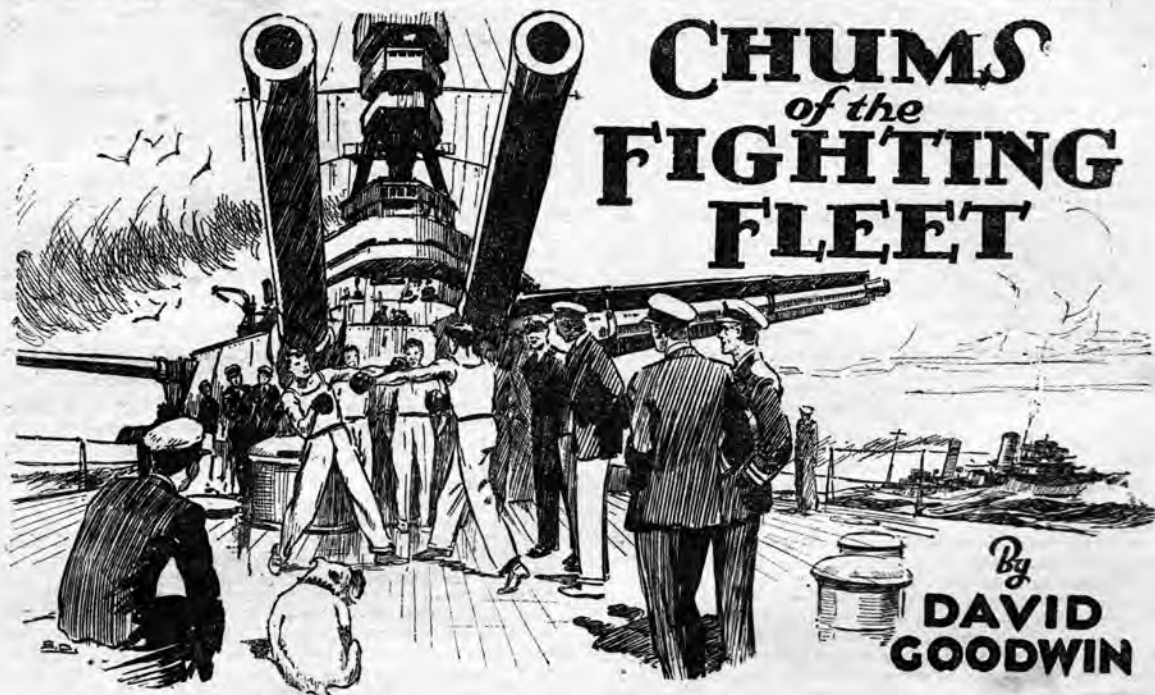
Judging by the small reproduction of next week's GEM cover below, it is no wonder that Cousin Ethel needs someone to prevent Skimpole from taking her on the river!



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FOLLOW NED AND JINKS, THE TWO MIDDIES, IN THEIR GREAT ADVENTURES!



Ned Hardy, the youngest middy on the Victorious, is determined to clear the name of his brother Ralph, who was dismissed the Service after a robbery aboard his ship. Ned believes that spies "framed" his brother. On ten days' leave with his pal Jinks, Ned arranges to go hunting "coupers," who sell illegal drinks to fishermen on the Dogger Bank, with Lieutenant Watson on board the Merlin. Ned sets out to join the Merlin in a small pinnace, and runs into heavy weather. Battered and waterlogged, he is rescued at the last moment, only to find himself in the hands of Long Dennis, the most notorious "couper" of the lot!

On the "Black Witch"!

THEY had not troubled to lock Ned in. There was nowhere for him to escape to, save the cold bosom of the North Sea.

"What does that fishy-eyed couper think he's going to make me do?" said Ned to himself. "The man's half drunk, and he was gassing."

"It looks to me as if only he and that big Russian lout, or whatever he is, are Voroff's men. The other toughs don't seem to be in it."

Ned swayed where he sat, through sheer weariness.

"Where have they put Simmons, I wonder? Must look after the fool, if I can. Weak-kneed chap, I'm afraid."

Ned nodded drowsily. He was so weary that he slid to the floor and fell into the deep stupor-like sleep of complete exhaustion.

How long Ned remained in that condition he never knew. It must have been many hours. When at last he roused himself, a strange, muffled clamour was ringing in his ears. It was some time before he realised where he was.

A hoarse, roaring chorus came from the after end of the smack, evidently from the main cabin. He groped for the door.

It was not locked. He found his way through a sort of alley shut off from the hold, towards the bulkhead of the main cabin, in which was a sliding door. The construction of the vessel puzzled Ned. He slid back the door, and was dazzled by a blaze of lamplight, that lit up an extraordinary scene.

The cabin was more than twice the size of most smack's "cuddies," and a sort of movable shelf, like a saloon-bar, ran across one end. Bottles and glasses sparkled in the lamplight, metal drinking-cups and pewters were everywhere, and a couple of large kegs with taps in them stood under the bar. The crew were drinking raw spirits, and every one of them had plainly had a good share already.

The smell of spirits and the fumes of bad tobacco filled the whole place. But the most surprising sight of all was Simmons—Simmons in the soaked and shrunken uniform of the Navy—serving out drink to the fishermen from behind the bar as fast as he could handle the bottles. He looked

badly scared and flustered; and as if he had been drinking himself.

Ned stared blankly, unable to believe his eyes. Then, darting forward, he dashed out of Simmons' hands the metal measure he was filling.

"What do you mean by truckling to these swabs?" cried Ned, white with anger.

"They made me, sir—they made me do it!" said Simmons thickly. "Couldn't help myself!"

The fishermen broke into a roaring laugh. Long Dennis shouldered his way to the bar, swaying stupidly. He turned to Ned.

"Get a noggin and a bottle, an' run round an' wait on these gentlemen! Quick about it, or I'll slit your ears! You know me—Long Dennis, o' the Black Witch!"

"You drunken dog!" said Ned, flushing red. "Do you know you are talking to a King's officer?"

"Ay!" roared the couper, with an oath. "Get to it!"

"I'll see your neck in a running bowline first!" said Ned.

Clegg, swearing savagely, aimed a heavy blow at the midgy's head with a pewter pot. Ned dodged in nimbly, and the next moment his right fist came home on the point of the couper's jaw, with Ned's whole weight behind it.

Long Dennis staggered back heavily and fell full length: his head crashed against the cabin wall, and he lay half-stunned. The spectators were astonished at the power behind the midgy's uppercut. The next moment Ned, striking out right and left, was borne down and dashed to the floor by four of Clegg's mates.

"Finish him! Let him have it!" panted one who had received Ned's fist in his eye.

"No!" gasped Clegg. "Wait, all of you! Wait till I'm ready to handle him. Put him back in the locker. I'll put paid to his account!"

Ned was dragged out through the sliding door, flung back into the place he had first occupied, and the door, deck-light, and hatch were closed on him. He was so beside himself with anger that he had no thought for the danger. The insults, the manhandling, and the suggestion that he should carry liquor for the crew in the couper's cabin nearly drove him crazy. He knew he could look for no mercy from Long Dennis.

He tried the door with all his might, but could not budge

it. Like most sailors, he carried matches in an airtight and watertight box, and, striking one, he looked about him.

One side of the locker was a thin bulkhead or partition of matchwood boarding, evidently recently put up, and in one place was a deep crack.

Ned searched the place, and, finding a rusty old scraping-iron in the locker, inserted its end in the crack, and levered with all his might. It did not take him long to burst away enough of the matchwood boarding to enable him to get through.

A smell of gin and bilge-water greeted him. He struck a match, and realised that he had not bettered himself much by the change. Here were a number of kegs and barrels, tightly packed in a large space.

"The after-hold," he exclaimed, "where they keep their filthy spirits. Any chance of the deck-hatches being open?"

He stood upon a barrel and found the middle hatch slightly loose.

"There'll be a watch on deck, though," he thought, "and nowhere for me to escape to, except into the sea." An idea struck him. "By Jove, I'll fire her! If there's a cat's chance to get away in the confusion, I'll chance anything sooner than let those brutes finish me!"

Ned's jaw was hard set; his eyes shone fiercely as he jumped down and attacked the head of the barrel he had been standing on. With the iron scraper he contrived to worry the top loose, and then, with one of the wedging-poles from the hold, he smashed it in. He served four others in the same way, and, levering one of them from its place, overturned it with an effort, sluicing the raw gin over the rest.

A mood of bitter recklessness was upon Ned Hardy, and he cared little enough what he did. In the spirit of Francis Drake, who sent the fire-ships in among the Spaniards three hundred years before, Ned fired his handful of matches, and flung them down into the sluicing alcohol.

The raw gin blazed up in all directions. In a few seconds the floor of the hold was a sea of flames, and all the casks were catching fire rapidly.

"There's an end of the Black Witch!" said Ned, as he jumped on a cask and flung back the hatch.

It was all he could do to struggle out in time; the flames were licking round his legs. As he gained the deck he was instantly pounced upon and pinned down by two of the couper's men.

"Here's that cursed middy breaking out agen! There's no holding him! Lash him up, mates!"

"Fire! The ship's on fire!" cried the steersman as the blue flames came leaping up through the hatch.

Long Dennis and his mates came tumbling up from below. Ned was already bound hand and foot by his two captors; the crew, shouting and cursing, did their utmost to quench the fire.

It was beyond mortal power, as they soon found. Several hundred gallons of spirits were ablaze; the timbers of the ship were crackling and burning fast. In twenty minutes, despite all efforts, she was a blazing furnace.

"The boats! Get aboard the other trawlers!" gasped someone; and a rush was made for the boats riding astern. "We'll be cooked if we stay here!"

Long Dennis, frantic with rage, bellowed like a bull.

"It's young Hardy's work! You vos a fool to give him der chance! Finish him now!" cried the Russian.

"Ay!" roared Clegg. "He started the fire, and he shall stay and cook in it!"

He dragged Ned up against the mainmast, lashed him there firmly. Then, with a savage cuff across the eyes, he left the midshipman and jumped into his boat, which pulled quickly away from the burning smack.

"Stay there an' grill!" roared Long Dennis, shaking his fist at the helpless Ned.

The glare of the burning smack lit up the sea, and showed a big Dutch trawler with a gaff topsail lying hove-to close by.

Long Dennis and his men boarded her; slowly she sailed away from the lurid glow of the Black Witch.

Ned, unable to move hand or foot, felt a thrill of horror as he saw them go, and heard their mocking taunts borne on the wind. The rigging was already ablaze, and the deck scorched his feet. Swiftly the crackling flames crept round, licking hungrily about him, fanned by the night wind, and roaring for their prey.

The Missing Middy!

IT was 6.30—five bells in the morning watch—when Lieutenant Watson turned out of his bunk aboard the Merlin in Hull docks. He jumped to the floor, glanced up at the skylight, and called his steward.

"Harris, has the pinnace arrived with Mr. Hardy?"

"No, sir," said the steward; "no signs of her."

Watson got into his clothes quickly, not even stopping

for his tub. Before he was ready Jinks appeared, half-dressed.

"Ned hasn't come back!" he exclaimed.

"I know. Can't understand it," said Watson anxiously. "As he didn't come last night, I supposed the pinnace was too badly broken down to start, and that he was stopping the night in Grimsby. It was too late for him to send a wire."

"But he'd have started on the early tide at daybreak this morning, and, if so, he ought to be here before now."

"It was blowing a gale all night, and it's pretty bad now," said Lieutenant Watson. "Perhaps he's waiting for it to ease."

"Ned'd never be stopped by a breeze of wind. What time were we going to start, sir?"

"Eleven o'clock. But I shall start earlier and go to meet him if he's not here by eight. I wish now that I'd sent a couple of men. Simmons is such a weak-kneed fellow that if anything went wrong Hardy would have his hands full; but I thought it would be all right for a run up the river in the pinnace, and I want all my crew for taking in stores."

He dispatched a telegram to Grimsby.

"Is gunboat Merlin's pinnace in the harbour?"

The harbour-master's answer came back in twenty minutes.

"Pinnace left 11 p.m. last night for Hull."

"There's something seriously wrong!" exclaimed Watson. "All night in that gale, and no sign of her anywhere. We'll get away after her."

A message was left with the Hull authorities that the Merlin's pinnace was missing, and in half an hour the grey gunboat had left Hull and its creek far behind, and was hustling down the wide, salt Humber as fast as her engines could drive her.

Jinks went up to the crossjack-yard with a pair of glasses and scanned the long, bare flats of sand and mud on both sides.

When Grimsby came in sight, however, and the sea beyond, but without the least sign of the lost craft having been seen, all hands on the Merlin looked grave. The sea was tumbling in masses of dirty greys and whites beyond the great river's mouth. A small smack was trawling opposite Grimsby; the gunboat ran down close to windward of her.

"Have you sighted a naval pinnace anywhere on the river?" shouted Watson to the fisherman at the smack's tiller.

"D'ye mean that little launch what was in Grimsby yesterday?" hailed the skipper. "When we was runnin' in last night I see'd her goin' out, 'bout midnight."

"Going out?" cried Watson. "Going up, you mean!"

"Nay; goin' down river fast towards the bar. She was a long way off me, but I thought 'twas no weather for the likes o' her out there. 'Tis a wonder if she didn't get swamped!" called out the smack's skipper. "I ain't seen her to-day!"

"That's torn it!" exclaimed Watson, in dismay, ordering the gunboat ahead again. "The pinnace broke down in the open here, and drove out to sea—that's what's happened! That fisherman thought she was steaming out, but she'd never do anything so mad. We must get out after her at once!"

The Merlin ran in abreast of Grimsby Harbour, stopping only long enough to send a boat ashore and make certain there was no news of the pinnace. Messages were left to be wired to the coastguard stations all along the Lincolnshire shore, and away went the gunboat to sea.

"Think we shall find him?" said Jinks, very white. "If we don't—"

"I shall do everything a man can do," said Lieutenant Watson, who was as anxious as Jinks himself. "If he's on top of the sea, we'll find him!"

The Merlin, steaming at her utmost pace, slashed through the broken water by the bar. Mile by mile, her decks steaming as she plunged her blunt nose into the rolling swells and flung the spray over her.

It seemed a hopeless task to look for a single tiny craft in that endless waste of tossing grey sea, especially as the chances were that the pinnace was already at the bottom. But this neither Watson nor Jinks allowed themselves to consider. They made themselves believe that Ned and his solitary crew were on top of the waves, and that they had got to find the derelict craft, if they had to scour every inch of the North Sea.

Lieutenant Watson showed the quick resource of the naval man in the way he made his plans. It was bound to be partly guesswork, but he calculated the force of the wind and set of the currents, and made a good shot at the probable direction in which the pinnace had driven. He headed the Merlin east by north.

There was not a man on the Merlin who did not do his utmost that day, and look-outs were stationed both on the fore and mainmasts—for the gunboat carried two. They were only signalling masts, and no great height.

The Merlin quartered to and fro over the waves in zigzags of three miles each way. Dusk fell on the sea, and hope seemed farther off than ever; in fact, it was well-nigh dead.

"It's a bad look-out," said Lieutenant Watson sadly. "There's just the chance of their having been picked up. But if not—well, we must stick to it all night, and use the searchlight. I took one aboard at Hull. The Merlin's never carried one before, but we needed it for the hunt after Dennis Clegg, the couper. It'll be a big help now."

"Beg pardon, sir," said a warrant officer, coming aft. "We've been trying to get the searchlight to work, but she's out of order."

Watson at once went to investigate, but the chief artificer was quite unable to get the searchlight in working order in less than a couple of hours. It had been sent aboard with a bad defect in it, and he would have to make and fit the missing part.

The artificer and his helpers took the searchlight below, and worked like niggers at it. Meanwhile, the Merlin steamed on, making what use she could of her ordinary lights. She went at no great speed for fear of missing the pinnace.

"I've got it into my head we aren't far off her," said Jinks, who had come down on deck, since staying aloft now was useless. "I can feel it."

"Hope so," said Watson gloomily; for he had despaired of success since the night fell, though he did not say so. "I'm afraid myself that we've come a good way beyond where she would be now. I'm thinking of turning and going back. These waters are so deserted—"

"Light on the starboard, sir!" hailed the look-out forward.

The Burning of the Witch!

BOOTH the officers turned to look. The light puzzled them. First it seemed like a small spark in the inky darkness to windward. Then it rapidly flashed into flames, and soon was casting a fierce glow over the sea all round it.

"It's a ship on fire!" exclaimed Watson. "Hard a-starboard! Bear straight down on her! Full speed!"

"It can't be the pinnace!" cried Jinks.

"It's a small vessel—a smack, I think," said Watson.

"Sailin' vessel to leeward, sir, carryin' no lights!" cried the look-out forward.

The Merlin, dashing along, suddenly passed a big, dark, red-sailed trawler sailing rapidly to the northward, flitting away like a bat as the gunboat approached.

"What the dickens is she up to? Why doesn't she go to the rescue?" cried Jinks.

He hailed the smack as she disappeared, but got no answer.

"Perhaps they've taken her crew off already," said Watson. "A foreigner, and no lights. This looks fishy to me."

How that smack blazes! Can you make her out yet? There can't be anybody alive aboard her."

A cry broke from Jinks.

"There's someone aboard! A man tied to the mast!"

"What!" cried the lieutenant. "You're dreaming, Jinks! You're seeing visions!" Both had their night-glasses to their eyes. "Great guns, you're right, though! What devil's work is this? Below there, more speed! Speed her up!"

The engine-room bell clanged furiously. The Merlin made still greater efforts to force her pace. At a slashing fifteen knots she rushed up to the burning vessel.

Her decks abaft the mainmast were a sheet of flame, her bulwarks crackled and roared. The fire was swiftly spreading all round the mast itself, to which was tightly bound a human figure, struggling and writhing in the midst of the threatening flames that were already beginning to char his clothes.

"It's Ned!" cried Jinks, with a gasp of horror. "It's Ned!"

"Hard over!" shouted Watson, springing to the wheel himself and taking it. "No time to lower a boat! Three of you stand by to jump!"

"I'm one!" panted Jinks, dashing down from the bridge, and running to the portside.

"It's Ned, sure enough! Heaven send we're in time to save him!"

With a rapid rush the Merlin swept round to windward of the burning vessel, and, amid the fierce shout of rage that went up from the gunboat's foredeck at the sight before them, a voice cried out:

"She's the Black Witch! See the name on her!"

The words reached Jinks, but he hardly gave a second's thought to them. In an agony of anxiety he stood by the rail as the gunboat swerved round, and saw the pale face of his chum amid the fast, uprising flames.

"Jump, lads!" came the cry.

And even before the Merlin ground against the burning smack's side, two leading seamen sprang on to the crackling deck, headed by Jinks.

Between them and the mast the fire was blazing fiercely, but the rescuers dashed straight through it, and reached the captive midshipman, whom the fire had not yet gripped. He was gasping for breath, and all but swooning.

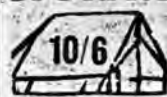
"Jinks, old chap!" croaked Ned hoarsely, his head falling forward on his chest. "Never thought—Come in time—Done me this time!"

"Hold him up!" panted Jinks, as he and the seamen swiftly slashed through the ropes that bound Ned to the mast. The flames roared faster, and would have driven back any but men of iron courage. Ned collapsed, and would have fallen among the flames as soon as the lines were cut, but that Jinks and Tom Sheriff, the Merlin's big seaman-gunner, held him up.

"Overboard—all of you!" roared Sheriff. "It's the only way!"

(Will Ned be able to tell them how Long Dennis got away? Jinks is burning for revenge, so watch out for thrills in next week's instalment.)

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